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HANDHELD BLENDERS

GREEN CLEANERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

DIGITAL MUSIC

Not just for kids

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Do you need to worry?

SNORING

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Some of life's mysteries

Have you, like me, looked at people walking about with tiny earphones (they're called buds) listening to music coming out of a matchbox-sized object stuck in their belt or pocket, and wondered how all the music got in there? The article on page 9 isn't just a test of digital music players — it's a beginner's guide to the whole concept of digital music.

Another article in this issue that brought an unexpected amount of interest out of the woodwork was our report on anti-snoring products (page 18). We were surprised at the number of volunteers willing to try out all the over-the-counter products we found but, in general, our guinea pigs found that unless they kept them awake they didn't do much about their snoring.

Our research also discovered little or no evidence that most of the products could be effective. They're another example of snake oil and 'miracle' cures profiting from people's desperation — in this case, to get a good night's sleep.

If you're keen to buy cosmetics whose ingredients haven't been tested on animals, that's another area where the consumer's path can be a pretty rocky one. The fact is that there are very few (if any) ingredients that haven't at some time been tested this way to demonstrate their safety for humans, but some brands are committed to using ingredients that at least haven't been animal-tested for some years, and won't use new ingredients that have been tested using animals. The article on page 34 has information on how to find them.

I hope you enjoy this issue of CHOICE.



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

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www.CHOICEextra.com.au



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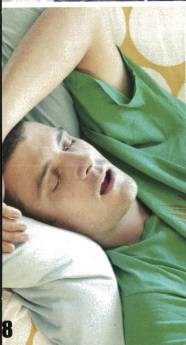
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Photo: Getty

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Larger dummy still a danger

In October 2005 we printed a *Choice Cut* about the **NUK Starlight Silicone Soother** (dummy) posing a choking danger for babies. Kerry-Ann Parsons of Townsville told us that her six-month-old baby, Alexander, had got the whole dummy into his mouth while settling down to sleep, and was choking on it when she came back to check on him.

In response to the incident, **NUK** said Alexander was at, or slightly over, the age recommended for the size of the dummy he was using (which was size one), and advised that he use the next size up.

After testing the dummy and comparing the two sizes we questioned this, as we found the problem was that the shield, which is the same size on both dummies, isn't big enough. Though the size two dummy has a larger teat, we don't think it's enough to stop a baby from being able to fit the whole dummy into their mouth.

This was confirmed recently by Jacqueline Nunan of Reservoir in Victoria. Having read the *CHOICE* article about the **NUK** dummy, Jacqueline bought her daughter Annika a size two version, even though at the time the baby was only four months old.

Recently, after Jacqueline had settled seven-month-old Annika in her cot and left the room, the baby managed to get the entire **NUK** dummy into her mouth. Coming back later to check on her, Jacqueline was horrified to discover her daughter with the dummy fully in her mouth and making "muffled, bleating noises". Though not actually choking Annika was clearly distressed.

When we contacted **NUK** for a response the company said a new model of **NUK Starlight Silicone Soother** with improved safety features would soon be available. It also said the dummy complies with the mandatory European standard. However, it doesn't comply with the Australian standard (which isn't mandatory) and we're seeing repeated instances of a problem resulting from the way it fails. Dummies that do meet the standard have a statement or logo saying so on the packaging.

As well as looking for this, *CHOICE* recommends the following:

- Buy a dummy with a large shield (though not so large it hurts your baby's nose or cheeks).
- Make sure the ring sits away from the shield, rather than flush up against it, so it can be easily gripped to remove the dummy.
- Don't leave babies unsupervised if they're unable to remove a dummy themselves.



ADMA's 'Do Not Contact' service

More and more people are registering with the Australian Direct Marketing Association's 'Do Not Contact' service, which covers direct mail, telephone, email and SMS, so ADMA has now streamlined these services and changed its contact details. If you're on this register, members of ADMA are required not to contact you with any of these types of marketing approach

(although, as the service is self-regulatory, it's not foolproof).

As of 1 March 2006, ADMA's consumer information phone number has changed to 1300 792 664. You can also register online at www.adma.com.au under 'Consumer help', or by mailing your full name and complete residential street address and telephone number (including area code) to: Do Not Contact



What's disease-mongering?

Disease-mongering is a condition that's on the increase. It happens when pharmaceutical companies try to create a demand for their products by encouraging people to believe they're ill when they're not. For example, sudden high media interest in a medical 'condition' (for which there just happens to be a new drug) might lead someone who's naturally introverted to believe they have social anxiety disorder and need medication. Or if you're going through a low period in your life another media campaign might make you think you're depressed and need

Updated

Service, Reply Paid, PO Box 4054, Sydney 2001.

After submitting your details, it'll take ADMA 45 days to process your request, after which you should receive less addressed advertising mail and fewer unsolicited telemarketing calls from ADMA member companies — though it won't stop them coming from local businesses and companies that aren't ADMA members.



adma

direct marketing
code compliant

ADMA members using this symbol comply with a strict Code of Practice that demands honesty, fair trading and the protection of your privacy.

drug therapy — in particular the drug that's been referred to in the media.

Direct-to-consumer drug advertising is only legal in the US and New Zealand, but drug companies target consumers and doctors in Australia in less obvious ways (such as these 'medical breakthrough' news stories, those 'ask your doctor' ads and 'public awareness' campaigns about certain health conditions) — CHOICE looked at this in more detail in an article in June 2004.

Pharmaceutical advertising affects consumers in two main ways. First, an increased demand for drugs will create pressures on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The cost will inevitably be passed on to consumers as higher prices for PBS drugs — they already increased again on 1 January this year.

Second, prescription drugs are strong medications, and some of them have serious side effects. Taking them could have serious implications for your future health. We shouldn't be pestering our doctors to prescribe them if in their view we don't really need them.

An inaugural conference on disease-mongering will be held in Newcastle on 11–13 April, organised by Professor David Henry, an academic at the University of Newcastle, and Ray Moynihan, journalist and co-author of *Selling sickness: How drug companies are turning us all into patients*. The conference will explore the above issues, including the marketing techniques pharmaceutical companies use. To find out more about it, go to www.diseasemongering.org. And CHOICE will be keeping an eye on the whole issue of disease-mongering.



Did you know that if you spend over a certain amount on PBS medicine (prescription drugs covered by the government-subsidised Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) within one calendar year, you can get the rest of the year's medication cheaper or free? However, the amount you need to spend equates to about a prescription a week, so not many people will qualify.

Here's the detail: if you and your family are general patients (Medicare card holders) and you spend more than \$960.10 on PBS drugs in a calendar year, your subsequent PBS medications will cost \$4.70 each. Concessional patients and their families (those with a Centrelink or DVA concession card) paying \$4.70 per script can get free PBS medicine that year once they've spent over \$253.80.

Note that the definition of 'family' doesn't include same-sex couples, which CHOICE thinks is discriminatory. Single people are also disadvantaged, as it's much harder for them to reach this threshold.

If, however, you think you're likely to qualify, ask your pharmacist for a Prescription Record Form (PRF), on which they'll record each PBS medication purchase. Once you've reached the threshold, ask your pharmacist for a Safety Net card to get your discounted or free PBS medicine.

You're responsible for checking that information is recorded correctly, telling the pharmacist when you reach the threshold and storing the card (though if you use only one pharmacy, ask them to keep it there). If you use more than one pharmacy, this can be difficult to monitor, especially for people with cognitive difficulties.

We think there should be a simpler, centralised system, particularly since pharmacists can charge a 'recording fee' of 97 cents or sometimes \$1.38. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia says a computerised system linking all pharmacies is currently being trialled, but it's unclear when it will be implemented.

There are other issues too. For instance, if you get a more expensive version of the drug — the 'brand premium' or 'therapeutic group premium' — the difference in cost between it and a cheaper generic version isn't covered by the Safety Net. And if you're prescribed a drug the manufacturer refuses to supply at the government's PBS price, you have to pay the difference. Known as a 'special patient contribution', this difference also isn't counted towards the Safety Net threshold.

To avoid paying extra, ask your doctor not to tick the 'brand substitution not permitted' box on your prescription, so the pharmacist can give you the generic version — a drug that's chemically identical to the branded one but less expensive — if there's one available.

And finally, there's the 20-day rule — if you need a repeat supply of some PBS drugs within 20 days, it can't be counted towards the Safety Net threshold. Another detail you need to know if you think you're eligible for the Safety Net.

Price survey: is online always cheaper?

There's a tendency to think shopping online means lower prices, but it's not always the case. *Computer CHOICE* checked a few popular products to see whether the web can deliver a good deal.

WHAT WE FOUND

Product	Average price online (\$)*	Average price in stores (\$)
APPLE iPod Shuffle 1 GB music player	202.38	199.00
APPLE iPod 30 GB music player	461.07	449.17
CANON PowerShot S2 IS digital camera	671.79	731.51
Book	34.02	22.70
CD	27.93	20.96
Computer game	51.42	50.32

* including delivery charges.

For the iPods, online prices tended to vary slightly and it may be possible to save a few dollars. Remarkably, the price in all the traditional stores was exactly the same.

For the CANON PowerShot S2 IS digital camera, in general the traditional stores were still the most expensive. Online appears to be the place to find a bargain on a digital camera, with about \$60 savings on average. On one website we could have saved more than \$150.

For the book, online prices were more expensive than traditional stores, mainly due to delivery charges. CD prices appear to be similar to books — online prices are inflated by delivery charges. For the computer game, online or offline, there's not really enough difference to suggest that either has a price advantage.

When buying online, there are a few important things to look for:

- An Australian Business Number (ABN) when you're using an Australian site.
- Contact details, including a customer contact phone number, email address and street address.
- A privacy policy.
- A returns policy.
- Postage and handling costs
- Payment options.
- Confirmation of transaction — always print a record.

If you'd like to subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



Thank you

We'd like to express our thanks to Mr and Mrs J N Almgren of Beecroft, NSW, who have again acknowledged our work for consumers with a generous donation. The Consumers' Association (publisher of *CHOICE*) is a non-profit organisation funded solely by the sales of *CHOICE* and our other products, and as such we're always very grateful for donations from subscribers.

Can you help?

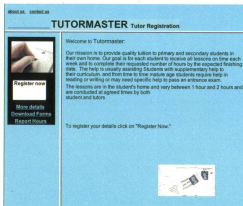
HAVING YOUR HOUSE LOOKED AFTER?

If you've used any kind of organisation that finds suitable people to look after your home while you're away (on holiday or for longer periods), we'd like to hear from you. We'd also like to hear from anyone who's registered with any organisation or been placed as a potential houseminder.

We're interested in your experiences — good and bad — with houseminding, the pros and cons, any problems to watch out for, and what it cost either the potential minder or the mindee.

Please email houseminding@choice.com.au or write to Houseminding, *CHOICE*, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, by April 21.

Thank you for your help.



ASIC warns about Tutormaster

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) warned consumers recently to be cautious when dealing with online tutoring company Tutormaster, following numerous complaints that the company hadn't been paying its debts — tutors hadn't been paid and parents' credits cards had been debited for services they hadn't received.

You need to be particularly vigilant when dealing with companies that trade exclusively online and require payment before supplying the services, ASIC cautioned. And potential tutors should be just as wary when offering their services if their contact with the company has only been via the internet. Tutormaster seems to have targeted university students in particular to provide tuition to primary and secondary students.

ASIC is continuing its inquiries into Tutormaster. If you have a complaint about this online tutoring company, you can lodge it with ASIC on its website (www.asic.gov.au) or write to the Manager, National Assessment & Action, ASIC, GPO Box 9827, in your capital city.

your letters

DIAL-UP TROUBLE

As I have relatives and friends in North America and Europe I bought a \$10 phone card, only to find out, having made several calls, that these cards expire three months after their first use.

As I am unlikely to ever make \$10 worth of calls in that time, I then bought a \$5 card, only to find that after a few brief phone calls my credit had expired.

I then bought two different \$5 cards. The first one opened with a credit of 500 minutes, but informed me after I'd made a few calls (adding up to 50 minutes) that my credit had been exhausted.

The second \$5 card was even worse, with the credit running out after I made two short calls to the US that added up to nine minutes.

As the cards didn't have the provider's details on them I had to ring the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman to get the contact phone numbers. After a number of persistent calls to the companies I learnt that the firms selling the cheaper cards charge as much as \$1.95 connection fee for each call. That means you can make, at best, two brief calls for \$5.

Even when using my regular phone-line provider I can still ring Europe or the US several times for probably less than \$5.

Horst Eisfelder of Carnegie, Victoria



The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) received 463 complaints about phone cards in 2005, up 18% from the previous year.

Before purchasing a phone card the TIO advises consumers to consider the following:

- Who is providing the card? Is there a local customer service number? (If so, you may want to try and call the number before you buy the card. If you can't get through it may be a sign of problems to come.)
- Are call rates subject to change without notice? Where can you get information about current rates?
- Does the card have an expiry date? Are you likely to use all the credit by then?
- To use a phone card you first have to dial an access number. Find out whether this is a toll-free number or regular local call. If it's free, check whether the rates

charged for the call itself are higher than for another card using a local-call number.

- Is there a connection fee in addition to the per-minute charges quoted at the point of sale?
- Is any recorded voice announcement available in your language?

FORCEFUL FITNESS

I had a similar problem with **FITNESS FIRST** to your reader Jonathan Stuart (CHOICE, December 2005). The club refused to deal with me unless it was face to face. I asked if I could cancel my and my wife's contracts by fax or email, but they insisted that I come into the gym instead and wouldn't even give me the fax number.

I think they have a very high-pressure sign-up technique and then lose a lot of customers during the 12-month no-cancellation period expires. The ideal

THUMBS UP!



■ When Don Harding's young daughter lost one of her favourite snap-on flowers from her sandals he emailed **BIRKENSTOCK'S** head office to find out if he could buy a replacement. Instead it sent him a whole new package of accessories, free of charge, by express post.

■ Kathryn Jacobsen awards a 'Thumbs up' to **SHERIDAN** for replacing her once used, twice washed fitted sheet when some of the stitching on the elastic came undone, with a new complete sheet set couriered to her door.

customer for these people must be someone who signs up and never uses the gym.

The gym was great and to my mind good value, but the way they tried to sell it was an insult to my intelligence as it was so obvious.

**Byron Palmer
West Perth, WA**

FITNESS FIRST told us it wants members to cancel their contracts face to face so it has an opportunity to resolve any concerns the member may have, find out why they want to leave, look at improving areas of complaint and give members the option to 'time-freeze' their membership for a period.

By coming into the club the member can also receive confirmation that their membership has been terminated in case of any queries later on.

The club said it apologises if anyone feels pressured to sign up, but believes that, in the end, it's always the buyer's choice as to whether they want to join the club.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a **CHOICE** book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Horst Eisfelder of Carnegie, Victoria, receives *Sustainable House* or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.





GENE ROSS

New twist on reverse mortgages

If you own your home and are (usually) 60 or over, a reverse mortgage lets you borrow money against its value. Generally the loan balance increases over time as interest and fees are added, but you usually only pay off the loan when you sell the house, permanently move out or die.

In the past year the number of reverse mortgage products available has dramatically increased, as has their value to lenders. Many new lenders are releasing products — as well as banks, credit unions and one building society, they're now offered by non-bank lenders, specialist companies and mortgage managers.

The **EXPLORER CAPITAL Succession Loan** is similar to a reverse mortgage, but your children are part of the contract and repay the interest. It may be suitable if your children want to support you and feel more comfortable doing this under a formal agreement. With the interest on the reverse mortgage repaid rather than accumulating till the property is sold, more equity remains in the home when you or your estate sell it.

However, with most other reverse mortgages voluntary repayments are also possible — there just isn't a formal agreement to do it. **CHOICE Money & Rights** hasn't been able to fully analyse this product yet as it wasn't launched at the time of writing, but if this kind of arrangement interests you, contact **EXPLORER CAPITAL** on 1300 659 806 or go to www.explorercapital.com.au.

For a report on reverse mortgages in general, see *Money & Rights*, April/May 2006.

Too late now to invest in gold?

After a long drought, gold has had a remarkable run over the last few years, coming back into the investment spotlight. In the five years to December 2005 the gold price increased by a massive 90% in \$US terms, reaching 20-year heights (see *Gold prices 1986 to 2005*, below). However, the \$US at the same time lost value against the \$A, so the increase is 44% in \$A terms. In January 2006 gold was trading around \$US550/oz.

Forecaster Macquarie Bank expects the rally in the gold price to continue, although it predicts it may peak in the second half of this year at over \$US600/oz.

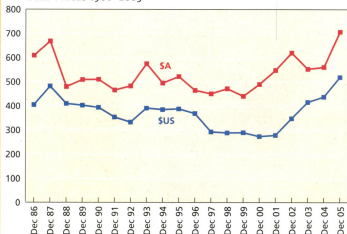
Why has the gold price increased so much?

Traditionally gold has been seen as a risk-management tool against market uncertainties and inflation. In the past gold has performed well in times of extreme movements in other asset classes. Currently reasons include the weakness of the \$US, high oil prices (which are seen as increasing the risk of inflation) and global uncertainties, such as the situation in Iran, the relationship between China and Taiwan, developments in Russia and the Middle East and terrorist threats. There's also increased interest by fund managers in investing in commodities, including gold, plus increased demand from jewellery makers, largely driven by growing affluence in China and India.

There are several ways to invest in gold. You can buy gold bullion (such as from the Perth mint), or more conventionally invest in shares of gold exploration and mining companies, or use a fund investing in gold or a range of commodities.

But before rushing into investing in gold, look at your overall investment perspective and keep in mind that you might be too late: gold and some other commodity prices (such as copper and zinc) are currently at record highs. Some forecasts have predicted prices may fall. According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics' December quarter commodity outlook: "Growth in world demand for most of the major minerals and energy commodities is expected to ease from current levels in 2006, reflecting weaker assumed growth in global industrial activity."

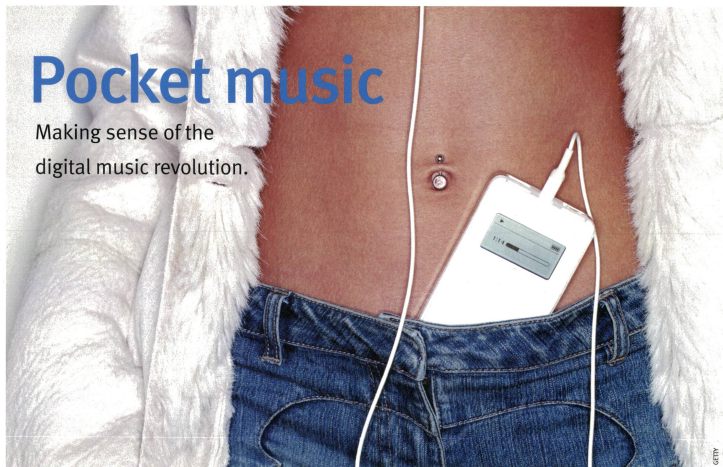
GOLD PRICES 1986-2005*



* Based on December 31 of each year.

Pocket music

Making sense of the digital music revolution.



It's no exaggeration to say that digital music players have truly revolutionised the way we listen to music. Whether it's on the treadmill at the gym or the bus on the way to work, chances are you'll see someone with one of these gadgets tucked in their pocket or hanging around their neck.

But if you've yet to jump on the digital bandwagon, fear not. While the idea of holding your whole music collection on a device little bigger than a matchbox may seem strange to those of us used to the clunky Walkmans and Discmans of yesteryear, taking your CD collection electronic isn't as complicated as it sounds.

WHAT IS IT?

A digital music player is a portable device that stores, organises and plays digital music files. You may have also heard them called MP3 players, which refers to a common type of digital file, or iPods, which is the brand name of Apple's digital music players.

The big advantage of these players over other portable music players is the amount of music they can store by using a digital format.

Digital files are able to shrink ('compress') the data needed in a music track to between 2.5% and 23% of its original size, with only a slight reduction

in sound quality. This is done by removing sounds that aren't generally audible to the human ear.

HOW DO I USE IT?

Before you can listen to your regular CDs on a digital music player you'll need to convert them to your player's format. To do this you need access to a computer with a CD drive and special software, which may be included with your digital music player when you buy it, or can be downloaded free from the internet (Windows Media Player is one example).

Once the CD has been copied ('ripped') onto your computer and encoded into the relevant file (which usually takes 5–10 minutes for a CD of average

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: Five flash and nine hard disc digital music players.

■ There are significant differences in sound quality and battery life, and they aren't necessarily dictated by price.

WHAT TO BUY

FLASH

APPLE iPod Shuffle (1 GB)	\$149
SAMSUNG YP-U1 (1 GB)	\$199

HARD DISC

SAMSUNG YH-J70 (20 GB)	\$499
COWON iAudio X5L (20 GB)	\$599
APPLE iPod 30GB (30 GB)	\$449
SONY Walkman NW-A1000 (6 GB)	\$379

IS IT LEGAL?

Currently under Australian law it's illegal to copy a CD that's protected by copyright from one format to another. This includes converting a regular CD you've bought to your digital player's format for your personal use. Given the growing popularity of digital music players we think it's unreasonable to expect people to pay again for the same album in a different format, and hope the law will be amended.

length), you can then transfer the files from the computer to your digital music player via a USB connection. Some players plug straight into your PC's USB port, while others need a USB cable.

If your computer is connected to the internet while you're ripping your CDs, it can automatically download available information about the particular album (such as the name of the track, artist, genre and year recorded) onto your digital music player to help you to sort and catalogue your music.

Another common way of putting music onto your player is by downloading it from the internet. There are several legal music websites where you can pay a fee to download tracks. However, you need to be aware that each site has different restrictions on how the downloaded music can be used (for example, on how many players). For more information go to www.choice.com.au and type 'online music' into the search box.

You can also download some audio broadcasts (such as radio segments) and video broadcasts from the internet onto your player. Known as 'podcasting,' this is still a relatively new trend, but the amount of content available for downloading is increasing all the time.

PHOTOS TOO

All the digital music players in this test can also store other forms of data, including digital photos (useful if you run out of room in your camera while on holiday, for example).

Continued on page 12

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are prof

FLASH

APPLE IPOD SHUFFLE

Price: \$149

Capacity: 1 GB

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.
- Comes with the best software we tested (iTunes).

BAD POINTS

- The only model with no screen, so you have to listen to your tracks in the order you downloaded them or in a random 'shuffle' mode.
- No tone or equalisation controls on the player.



SAMSUNG YP-U1

Price: \$199

Capacity: 1 GB

GOOD POINTS

- Easiest to use of all the models tested.

BAD POINTS

- Loses settings if the battery runs out completely.
- The screen is very reflective in direct sunlight.



What to look for

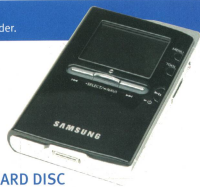
- The size of the screen is an important factor for some people. Generally, the bigger the screen, the easier it will be for you to navigate through your music collection (or look at photos, if you use it for that). But of course this also adds to the size of the player.
- You need to find out whether the battery can be recharged from the USB port in your computer and, if so, whether the player plugs directly into the computer or requires a USB cable. Alternatively, you may want a player that can recharge from an AC adapter, or can use either method. Also ask the retailer whether you can continue to use the player while it's recharging.
- If you're buying a player with limited memory, ask if you can buy extra memory storage in the future if you need it.
- If you use a Mac or an older PC it's important to check the player is compatible with your computer.

SWIMMING TO MUSIC?

Keen swimmers might be tempted by the OREGON SCIENTIFIC MP120 flash player, the only waterproof model tested. But when we tried it out in a public pool our swimmer found the player froze after a few laps. There were also some rust-coloured stains on one of the special 'waterproof' earphones after it was used, suggesting it may be corroding. It wasn't a great performer out of the pool either, scoring the lowest of all the flash players.



PROFILES: GENE ROSS



HARD DISC

SAMSUNG YH-170

Price: \$499

Capacity: 20 GB

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent battery life.
- Can display images.
- Has an FM radio.

BAD POINTS

- The display is difficult to see in direct sunlight.
- No dedicated volume control — you have to use the up/down scroll button.



COWON IAUDIO X5L

Price: \$599

Capacity: 20 GB

GOOD POINTS

- The best battery life in the test.
- Can display images and video.
- Has an FM radio.

BAD POINTS

- The body is thicker and heavier than the other models tested.
- The supplied software is quite confusing, as it comes in two separate parts.
- No dedicated volume control.



APPLE IPOD

Price: \$449

Capacity: 30 GB

GOOD POINTS

- The best sound quality using the earbuds supplied.
- Comparatively large, bright screen.
- Can display images and video.
- Comes with the best software we tested (iTunes).

BAD POINTS

- The screen is easily marked and scratched.
- There's no provision for a strap or lanyard.
- No dedicated volume control — you have to use the click-wheel.
- The body is very reflective in sunlight.



SONY WALKMAN NW-A1000

Price: \$379

Capacity: 6 GB

(SONY recently launched a 20 GB music player for \$449, too late for our test.)

GOOD POINTS

- Second-best sound quality of the models tested, using the earbuds supplied.
- Competitively priced, though a lower capacity than the other three hard disc models in the *What to buy* list.

BAD POINTS

- The screen is extremely difficult to read in direct sunlight.
- The body is very reflective in direct sunlight.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

FLASH

■ The IRIVER T20 and the PANASONIC SV-SD100M were let down by their lower battery and sound quality scores respectively. See *Swimming to music?*, below left, for the OREGON SCIENTIFIC MP120.

HARD DISC

■ The TOSHIBA Gigabeat F20 is comparatively more difficult to use. The software provided has no help files and only allows you to store downloaded files on your player, not on your computer.

■ The IRIVER H10 claims to have a battery life of 12 hours, but we found it had no more than nine. However, it's comparatively easy to use and can display images.

■ The CREATIVE Zen Neeon is the lightest and one of the cheapest of the hard disc models and has a very good battery life, but is let down by its sound quality. It scored much better when used with conventional headphones, so it may still be worth a look if you already have a set of good earphones.

■ The OREGON MP305 and MSI Megaplayer are more difficult to use than the other models tested. The MSI also has the poorest sound quality in the test, dramatically improved with a better set of headphones (see page 13).

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE					5 FEATURES				
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Battery life score (%)	Best measured battery life (hours)	Recharge via USB	AC adapter supplied	Playback while recharging	Mac-compatible	FM radio
FLASH										
APPLE iPod Shuffle M9725P/A	80	89	68	87	16.0	✓		✓	✓	
SAMSUNG YP-U1	80	95	68	76	13.5	✓				
IRIVER T20	76	86	69	68	9.0	✓				✓
PANASONIC SV-SD100M	75	85	58	87	16.0	✓	✓	(C)		✓
OREGON SCIENTIFIC MP120	68	76	66	54	5.5	✓	✓	(C)	✓	✓
HARD DISC										
SAMSUNG YH-J70	79	79	68	99	24.0	✓	✓	✓		✓
COWON iAudio X5L	76	71	70	100	33.5 (B)		✓	✓	✓ (D)	✓ (E)
APPLE iPod 30GB White MA002X/A	76	74	74	84	14.5	✓		✓		
SONY Walkman NW-A1000	74	70	72	87	16.0	✓	✓	(C)		
TOSHIBA Gigabeat F20	69	65	67	82	13.5	✓	✓	✓		
IRIVER H10	68	74	62	69	9.0		✓	✓		✓ (F)
CREATIVE Zen Neon	66	71	52	85	20.5	✓				✓
OREGON SCIENTIFIC MP305 (A)	66	60	65	81	13.0	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MSI Megaplayer 536	60	63	50	75	11.0		✓	✓	✓	✓

WHAT IF I DROP IT?

You might expect the hard disc players would be more likely than flash players to be damaged when accidentally dropped, due to their movable disc. We were surprised — and pleased — to find that all the players still functioned after being dropped onto a hard surface three times from a height of one metre.

The most common format for photos from a digital camera is JPEG, so if you want to look at your photos on the player as well, you'll need one that can both store and display them in that format. You'll also need one with a reasonably sized colour screen in order to view photos on it.

If your camera has a USB connection it may be possible to connect your player directly to the camera to transfer the photos and save you carrying a laptop around on holidays to store your pics. If this interests you, take your camera along when buying a player to make sure it's compatible.

FLASH VS HARD DISC

The difference between the two types of digital music player on test is the memory used to store the music files.

Players using a flash memory have no moving parts — everything required to store and play the digital music files is included on the chip.

These players continue to get smaller and lighter: the **APPLE iPod Shuffle** weighs in at a tiny 22 g, making it a handy companion when sweating it out on the treadmill. But the smaller size also means they can't store as many songs on them as the hard disc players. All the flash models tested have 1 GB of memory, which can hold roughly 250 songs of average length.

The display screens on flash players are also smaller (or non-existent for the **APPLE iPod Shuffle**).

This means it can be harder to sort through your catalogue of music to find your favourite track, and the **iPod Shuffle** will only play your songs in the order you downloaded them onto your player or a random 'shuffle' mode.

Hard disc players, on the other hand, store the files on a hard drive, like the one in a computer. This makes them larger and heavier than the flash players, but they can also store far more music. The models tested range in memory from 4–30 GB.

RECHARGING

All the players on test use rechargeable batteries. Most of them can be recharged by attaching them to your computer's USB port, either directly or via a USB cable. However, the **COWON iAudio**, **IRIVER H10** and the **MSI Megaplayer** can only be recharged at a power point via an AC adapter. Some players allow you to recharge by either method.

Generally batteries charge more quickly when using an AC adapter than through the USB port.

Some models also allow you to continue listening to the player while it recharges off the USB port, while others don't (see the table for model details).



Store id Display EG files	SPECIFICATIONS				Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Weight (g)	Warranty (years)	Price (\$)
	Capacity (GB)	System requirements	Software	Website				
1		Mac OS X 10.2.8 or 10.3.4+, Windows XP SP2+	iTunes 4, Quicktime Player 6 for Windows and Mac	www.apple.com.au	85 x 25 x 9	22	1	149
1		Windows 98SE+, DirectX 8.0+, 40 MB HDD space, Windows Media Player 9 or 10	Samsung Media Studio 4.0	www.samsung.com	89 x 25 x 14	33	1	199
1		Windows XP	Iriver plus 2	www.iriver.com.au	61 x 27 x 15	30	1	242
1 (G)		Windows XP SP1+, 100 MB HDD space	SD-Jukebox 5.0 LE	www.panasonic.com.au	42 x 41 x 18	39	1	245
1		Mac OS 9+, Windows 98SE+, 10 MB HDD space	None supplied	www.oregonscientific.com	50 x 50 x 27	35	2	199
20		Windows XP, 50 MB HDD space, DirectX 9.0+	Samsung Media Studio 4.0	www.samsung.com	100 x 64 x 18	134	1	499
20		Mac OS X, Windows 98SE+	JetShell 3.20 PRO, JetAudio VX 6.1	www.laudio.com	103 x 62 x 24	188	1	599
30		Mac OS X 10.3.9+, Windows XP SP2+	iTunes 6, Quicktime Player 7 for Windows and Mac	www.apple.com.au	104 x 61 x 10	134	1	449
6		Windows XP, MCE 2004/5, 200 MB HDD space	Connect Player 1.0	www.sony.com.au	87 x 56 x 16	108	1	379
20		Windows XP, 100 MB HDD space	Gigabeat Room 2.0.2	www.isd.toshiba.com.au	106 x 63 x 15	150	1	369
5		Windows XP	iRiver plus 1.1	www.iriver.com.au	96 x 55 x 14	98	ns	329
6		Windows 98SE+, 170 MB HDD space	Creative Zen Neon Media Explorer 2.00, Creative MediaSource 3.20	www.creative.com	80 x 49 x 16	74	1	300
5		Mac OS 9+, Windows 98SE+, 10 MB HDD space	Musimatch Jukebox 8.2	www.oregonscientific.com	87 x 58 x 20	102	2	299
4		Mac OS 9+, Windows ME+	None supplied	www.msi.com.tw	96 x 61 x 16	98	ns	299

CAN BETTER HEADPHONES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

In short, yes. Our panel of listeners almost always gave higher scores for sound quality when listening with a set of conventional headphones we provided, compared to the earbuds supplied with the player. The most notable difference was for the **MSI Megaplayer**, which our panel gave a poor score of 41% for sound with the supplied earbuds, compared to 76% with the headphones.



* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in January/February 2006.

ns Not stated.

HDD Hard disc drive.

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

(B) The battery was only run out once; both other times it was still going after 24 hours.

(C) Via AC charger only.

(D) Limited functionality.

(E) Doesn't have a region setting for Australia, but does work.

(F) Some H2o models don't support FM radio, so check when you buy.

(G) A model with a 0.5 GB SD card is also available.

1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Ease of use score: 40%
- Sound quality score: 40%
- Battery life score: 20%

2 Ease of use score

This is made up of:

- Playback score: 40%
- Initial setup score: 20%
- Portability score: 20%
- Earphones ('buds') score: 10%
- Transfer score (using software supplied or Windows Media Player if none was supplied): 10%

3 Sound quality score

- Listening panel score (using earbuds supplied with the player): 80%
- Technical measurements score: 20%. Made up of the following aspects, weighted equally: Frequency response, Signal-to-noise ratio.

Total harmonic distortion.
Channel separation.

4 Battery life score

We first conditioned the batteries by fully charging and discharging them three times. We then ran the players until the batteries ran out at least twice, and scored them on the best result.

5 Features

See *What to look for*, page 10, for an explanation of the features in the table.

6 Store and display JPEG files

While all the models can store digital photos, the most common file format for photos from a digital camera is JPEG. So if you want to view your photos on your digital player it will need this display format too. See *Photos too*, page 10, for more.

It can look beautiful — and taste a little different — but salt is salt.

DESIGNER SALT?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Sea salt, pink salt, Maldon salt, Murray River salt ... it seems salt's more than just salt these days. Some of these fancy types look beautiful, and they can taste a little different from each other, but they're still at least 99% sodium chloride ...

■ ... which means too much of them is just as bad for you as too much ordinary salt. There's now good evidence linking salt with high blood pressure, so it's worth watching how much you eat.

All the celebrity chefs have their favourites: Jamie's is Maldon sea salt (from his beloved Essex); Nigella seems to go for Maldon or other sea salt too; Stefano di Pieri has tied his gondola to Murray River salt; Maeve O'Meara and her *Food Lover's Guide* say Australian sea salt is "as good as you can get"; Neil Perry favours sea salt too, but despite their surfing theme, Ben and Curtis mostly go with plain old salt. So what's with the celebrity salt?

A QUICK COURSE IN DESIGNER SALT

However designer the salt, it's still about 99% sodium chloride. Impurities and trace amounts of other minerals can give it a slightly different flavour, but whether you'll really still taste a difference after you've added it to the food and cooked it all together is a very open question. However, fancy salt does look good while you're cooking. As Maeva O'Meara told us, "It's an aesthetic thing — these salts are lovely on the table and they feel lovely between the fingers."

The slight differences in looks and taste depend on the minute traces of various minerals and on how the different salts are made.

Sea salt is made by evaporating seawater. If it isn't refined it contains traces of magnesium, calcium and other minerals that add a slightly bitter flavour (and it can also have a few algae, salt-tolerant bacteria and other bits and pieces).

■ **MALDON Sea Salt** comes as large, flaky crystals. It's made from seawater "using only traditional natural methods" and claims to be "a completely natural product, retaining valuable seawater trace elements such as magnesium and calcium".

■ **HALEN MON Pure White Sea Salt** comes from "the fresh Atlantic waters around the Isle of Anglesey" off Britain. Its label (in Welsh as well as English) claims, "Sea salt crystals provide a balance of minerals and trace elements such as magnesium, zinc, potassium and calcium."

THE SALT-SODIUM CONNECTION

Food labels tell you the level of salt in a food in terms of milligrams of sodium. Salt is the chemical sodium chloride (NaCl). One teaspoon of salt (5 g) contains about 2 g of sodium — if you ever need to calculate it, dividing the amount (weight) of salt you have by 2.5 gives you a rough guide to the amount of sodium.



■ **MASTERFOODS Sea Salt** helpfully tells you that it "contains sodium, an essential trace element. Our bodies need it for healthy cell functioning." All true — but no mention of how little sodium we in fact need.

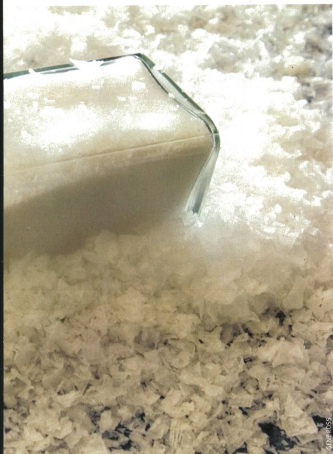
■ **MURRAY RIVER Gourmet Salt Flakes** are also flaky crystals like MALDON, but they're a pinkish-brown colour. They're made from "underground saline waters" in the Murray-Darling Basin that have "been lying dormant for thousands of years".

■ **HORIZON Crystal Salt Flakes** is another Australian product, also from an underground source of saline water (in northern Victoria). It



Jamie goes for Maldon salt, Nigella for sea salt generally ... does it really matter?





claims to have “a full-bodied natural flavour that leaves no aftertaste or bitterness”.

■ **Celtic salt** is sea salt made using traditional methods on the Atlantic coast of Brittany in France. In the tradition of druids and sacred groves, **BLOOMS Natural Celtic Sea Salt** claims, “Celtic salt may have an effect on the aging process due to its influence on the structure of our cells.” Too good to be true? Probably — we asked the manufacturer for evidence to justify its claim, but none was forthcoming.

Rock salt comes from underground salt deposits. It's usually been refined, otherwise it would be like the rough stuff that's used for de-icing roads in North America. This doesn't stop some manufacturers from making special claims. **SELECT NATURALS Rock Salt**, for example, says it's “the natural choice for good health”.

Black salt from India is another version of rock salt. When ground it's a pinkish-grey colour rather than black. It comes from volcanic regions and has a strong sulphurous flavour. You might see it recommended for people with high blood pressure or even claims that it contains no sodium — not true.

REALITY CHECK

Use whichever kind of salt you fancy if you don't mind the price difference between ordinary and designer salts. From a health viewpoint they're all the same — that is, any salt can contribute to high blood pressure (see *How much is too much?*, right). And whatever some of the labels say, there's no health benefit from the trace minerals such as calcium and magnesium. There's not enough of them to do you much good without overdosing on sodium.

How much is too much?

High blood pressure is often called the ‘silent killer’ because there are no obvious symptoms — but the higher your blood pressure, the greater the risk of having a stroke or heart attack. There's good evidence that too much salt is a major cause of high blood pressure:

- A high salt intake is associated with an increased risk of developing high blood pressure as you get older.
- If you already have high blood pressure a low-salt diet can lower it.
- If you're on blood-pressure-lowering medication, a low-salt diet can boost the effect and you may be able to take less (but check with your GP first).

SHAKE THE SALT HABIT

The National Health and Medical Research Council's *Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults* recommend that you choose foods low in salt and cut back to no more than about 6 g of salt a day (a bit over a teaspoonful, amounting to around 2.3 g of sodium) — less if possible. But it's not as easy as it sounds, because on average about 75% of the salt in our food comes hidden in processed foods and takeaways and you don't know how much of it you're eating.

We checked the sodium levels (which are given on labels in milligrams rather than grams) in some of the foods in the **CHOICE** standard grocery basket that we use to compare supermarket prices (see the table, *Example of a day's meals and snacks*, page 17). If you ate a serve of all these foods over a day they'd give you about 3400 mg of sodium — considerably more than the maximum daily intake of 2300 mg (2.3 g) recommended by the *Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults*.

Often there are low-salt or reduced-salt versions. Choosing these could save you nearly 2000 mg of sodium and bring the total to well below the recommended maximum (see the table for details).

Particular foods to watch are:

- **Bread.** On average about 25% of our salt intake comes from bread. You can buy low-salt bread but you may have to search for it.
- **Breakfast cereals.** Many popular brands have far too much salt (see **CHOICE**, March 2005, for details). Muesli is usually a good choice.
- Foods such as **bacon, sausages** and most **cheeses**, where salt is traditionally used as a preservative.
- **Soups, tinned vegetables and sauces** can be loaded with salt. There can be big differences between brands, so check the labels.
- **Cakes and biscuits** can be surprisingly salty. Again it varies a lot from brand to brand, so check the labels. Our shopping basket contains **ARNOTT'S Tim Tam** biscuits, which are relatively low in salt (170 mg of sodium per 100 g of **Tim Tams**), but if you bought **ARNOTT'S Tiny Teddy Chocolate** biscuits instead, you'd be getting 390 mg of sodium per 100 g.

LABEL LINGO

Food labels now make it easier to choose foods with less salt. The nutrition information panel must tell you the amount of sodium (rather than salt) in the food you're eating (see *The salt-sodium connection*, far left).

To compare products it's best to use the amount per 100 g rather than the amount per serve, as serving sizes can vary. But don't agonise over small differences (50 mg or so) — it's keeping the total down that counts. Foods called ‘low-salt’ must have less than 120 mg sodium per 100 g of the food.

How salt savvy are you?

Check out our quiz and find out.

Most of the salt in our diet comes from:

- (A) Salt we shake on at the table.
- (B) Salt that's added during food processing.
- (C) Salt that occurs naturally in foods.

Too much salt can cause:

- (A) Diabetes.
- (B) Tooth decay.
- (C) High blood pressure.

Which has the most salt?

- (A) Frozen green beans.
- (B) Fresh green beans.
- (C) Tinned green beans.

A bowl of cornflakes has about the same amount of salt as a small packet of potato crisps.

True or false?

Celery salt and garlic salt don't count. They're made from vegetables, so I can have as much as I like.

True or false?

I'm a keen runner and compete in triathlons so I lose a lot of salt as sweat, especially in the summer months. I need plenty of salt on my food to avoid getting cramp.

True or false?

You can always tell what foods are high in salt because they taste salty.

True or false?

Salt 'brings out the flavour' in food and it's bland without it.

True or false?

Only old people need to worry about how much salt they eat.

True or false?

You have to use salt in cooking. Recipe books tell you to use it — and so do the chefs on TV cooking shows.

True or false?



ANSWERS

(B) About 75% of many people's salt intake comes from processed food. Fresh foods generally contain very little. Even saltwater fish has only about 80–100 mg of sodium per 100 g of fish, and meat has about the same. Fruit and vegetables have less — broccoli about 8 mg and apples about 2 mg of sodium per 100 g.

You're unlikely to add much from a salt shaker. A study of people's salt-shaking habits found that the amount they added depended more on the size of the hole than taste preferences.

(C) There's now strong evidence that too much salt can cause high blood pressure (see *How much is too much?*, page 15). A high salt intake may also increase your risk of stomach cancer, which is particularly prevalent in Japan where they eat a lot of salt-preserved foods. On that basis, it's better not to eat lots of salt-preserved foods such as anchovies and olives too often. There's no evidence salt can cause tooth decay.

(C) Fresh and frozen green beans contain very little salt, while tinned ones are often salted. The amount added can vary a lot between brands, so check the labels.

True — cornflakes are still one of the saltiest cereals around. For more information on the salt content of cereals, see CHOICE, March 2005.

False — celery salt and garlic salt are only ordinary salt with some added flavours. They have almost the same sodium content as ordinary salt.

False — we need sodium for transmitting electrical impulses through nerves and assisting in muscle contraction. But we only need 1–2 g of salt a day to replace salt lost from the body in sweat and urine. If you're not eating a lot of salt your body adjusts and your sweat is less salty. There seems to be no basis to the common belief that lack of salt causes muscle cramps, and the Australian

army no longer issues salt tablets to troops operating in tropical conditions.

False — some foods that are high in salt don't taste very salty. Sometimes this is because they have a lot of sugar, such as some biscuits and breakfast cereals. And our taste buds get used to high levels of salt, so you might not notice the saltiness of some foods. Once you cut back on salt and come back to a food you used to eat you might be surprised at how salty it tastes.

False in reality, though if you're used to foods that are high in salt or add lots of salt to your food, you could find meals bland and uninteresting when you first cut down because our taste buds get used to high levels. If you persevere for a few weeks you can train them to taste food with less, and then you're more likely to enjoy food with less salt or even with none at all. Salt can hide more subtle flavours, so you might prefer some foods when your taste buds have had time to adjust.



What about iodine?

Iodine deficiency disorders, which in extreme cases cause mental retardation, were once common in several Australian states and still are in some countries overseas that don't have food sources of iodine. In developed countries iodine has for decades been added to table salt as a means of providing an adequate source for whole populations.

However, iodine deficiency seems to be re-emerging as we cut back on the amount of (iodised) salt we add at the dinner table or while cooking. Milk also no longer provides as much iodine as in the past because iodine-based disinfectants used in milk production are being phased out.

Your body can't store iodine so you need small amounts regularly in your diet. The richest sources are seafood and seaweed, but not everyone eats them (especially seaweed).

Our food regulator is looking into requiring manufacturers to use iodised salt in bread and other processed foods. But buying iodised salt for when you do use it at home is a good idea.

False — the association between salt and high blood pressure is certainly strongest for older people. But recent studies show that too much salt can raise your blood pressure at any age. It's true that you have less chance of developing heart disease or a stroke in your 20s or 30s than when you're older. But if you have high blood pressure when you're young, you're still at greater risk than someone the same age with normal blood pressure.

True and false — salt in the cooking water makes vegetables soften quicker and pasta easier to cook to a perfect *al dente*, but in recipes it's usually a matter of taste (see Question 8). Cooking with salty foods like bacon or sausage is likely to make a bigger difference to the amount of salt you eat than adding salt to a recipe — and as with all things salt, less is healthier than more.

EXAMPLE OF A DAY'S MEALS AND SNACKS

Product (in order of highest to lowest salt per serve)	Serve size (g)	Sodium (mg / serve)
Bacon middle rashers	50	700
SPC Baked Beans	210	700
TIP TOP Sunblest Soft White Bread	65	293
DOLMIO Chunky Bolognese Sauce	131	549
KRAFT Singles	21	301
GREENSEAS Tuna Chunks in Brine	65	195
SAKATA Barbecue Rice Crackers	30	176
Butter	25	174
KELLOGG'S Nutri Grain	30	167
ARNOTT'S Tim Tam Biscuits (A)	30	51
SAN REMO Large Pasta Spirals	120	36
JUST JUICE Orange Juice	200	<10
GOULBURN VALLEY Peach Slices	50	4
MCCAIN Frozen Peas	50	2
Total sodium per day		3358

LOW OR REDUCED-SALT EQUIVALENT

Product	Sodium (mg / serve)	Sodium saved per serve (mg)
(B)	700	0
HEINZ Baked Beans No Added Salt	42	658
MOORE'S Low Salt Wholemeal Bread	49	244
DOLMIO Chunky Bolognese Sauce Low Salt	333	216
NIMBIN Natural Cheese Reduced Sodium	63	238
SAFCOL Tuna in Springwater	98	97
TRIDENT Plain Rice Crackers	48	128
WESTERN STAR Unsalted Butter	-5	169
SANITARIUM Puffed Wheat	2	165
(A)	51	0
(C)	36	0
(C)	<10	0
(C)	4	0
(C)	2	0
Total sodium savings	(1443)	1915

(A) Tim Tams are relatively low in salt; some other biscuits have a lot more.

(B) There is no low or reduced-salt equivalent.

(C) These products naturally have relatively little salt.

GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK



Is there any evidence to support claims for over-the-counter anti-snoring products?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Although snoring is usually more of a problem for the bed partner than the snorer, heavy snoring may be a sign of a sleep apnoea, a more serious condition (see page 20)

■ Evidence to support most of the claims of effectiveness made by manufacturers of snoring products is pretty thin on the ground.

■ There's no single cause for snoring, and it can be due to a combination of causes. So there's no 'one-cure-fits-all' available, although lifestyle changes seem to be the most successful and safest treatment.

According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, the loudest snores recorded reached 93 decibels — about the volume of a bus engine. This isn't funny if you're regularly losing sleep because of your partner's snoring, or if you're repeatedly woken by a dig in the ribs for your snoring.

Snoring can create social, relationship and health troubles — for the partner as well as the snorer. Studies of women whose partners snore find they have more health problems than those whose partners don't, with some even ending up with hearing loss.

There's no shortage of products claiming to treat snoring — we found pillows, nasal dilators and strips, throat sprays, inhalations and tablets. Whether they actually work is another story. In search of evidence, we contacted the manufacturers or suppliers of 10 popular anti-snoring products, asking them to provide documentation to support their product's claims.

We then searched for medical literature on the topic, and spoke to experts — an otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat [ENT] specialist), a researcher from a sleep centre, a professor of sleep medicine, a dental prosthetist, an aromatherapist and a

homeopath — for their take on these products and the supporting research we found.

We also asked some snorers to try some of the products to find out how easy and comfortable they are to use (see *What are they like to use?*, page 21).

WHAT CAUSES SNORING?

Snoring occurs when there's any kind of collapse, blockage or restriction of the upper airway that hinders the flow of air through the back of the mouth or nose. The snoring sound is created by the vibration of the soft tissues at the back of the throat.

You might snore only when you've got a cold, or if you've been drinking alcohol, which causes the tongue and muscles in the throat to relax. The most common cause of persistent snoring is being overweight. This is because overweight people have extra bulk around the neck that can restrict their airways. There's also experimental evidence that abdominal fat pushes the chest up towards the upper airway, which then loses its tension, becoming floppy.

Having an enlarged tongue, uvula, tonsils or adenoids may also make you snore. Other causes include sleeping pills, muscle relaxants, nasal congestion or a bent septum (the wall that separates

the nostrils). Some people only snore when they're lying on their back.

Snoring can also be associated with illnesses such as hypothyroidism and some diseases affecting the central nervous system. It can also be a sign of sleep apnoea (see page 20).

The products we researched claimed to stop or reduce snoring by altering posture, 'retoning' throat tissues, opening or clearing airways or reducing swelling at the back of the throat.

THE PRODUCTS

■ Pillows

We looked at two pillows — DENTONS Anti-snore Silent Knight Therapeutic Pillow and DICK WICKS Magnetic Anti-snore Pillow. The label on the DENTONS pillow claims it stops or reduces snoring for the 70% of people who snore "... due to restricted breathing, caused by bad posture during sleep". Despite repeated requests, the company didn't provide evidence to back up this claim.

DICK WICKS told us its Magnetic Anti-snore Pillow prevents snoring by supporting the user's neck, keeping the soft palate away from the throat. It had no studies to support this theory. The magnetic part of the pillow is supposed to reduce pain (the company said some customers claimed a reduction in pain meant a reduction in snoring too). Again, it didn't provide evidence to support this claim, and when CHOICE looked at static magnet therapy (September 2004), we didn't find conclusive evidence for pain relief either.

The only clinical trial of a pillow we could find compared three popular snoring aids (a nasal strip, a throat spray and a specially designed pillow). It found all three ineffective.

Theoretically, something that extends the neck may open the airway. But experts doubt a pillow could hold a person in one position to keep their neck extended for the whole night.

■ Nasal strips and dilators

Nasal strips and dilators help open the nasal passages so the user can breathe more freely through the nose rather than the mouth. The ENT specialist from the Australian Society of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (ASOHNs) thought these devices could help a small number of people whose snoring is caused by certain types of nasal obstruction.

The BREATHE RIGHT nasal strips website lists a number of studies related to this product's various uses, including as an anti-snoring device. These showed contradictory results — for instance, an



The anti-snoring products we found and checked out. There's little or no evidence to support the claims made by most of them.

independent study showed BREATHE RIGHT nasal strips to be ineffective, while another (financed in part by the BREATHE RIGHT sole distributor) showed a reduction in the frequency of snoring in a group of patients with rhinitis.

The website for PHARMACURE Nozovent, a nasal dilator, also has links to clinical trials of its product. While these showed positive results, our ENT and sleep medicine experts thought the way the product was rated was too subjective to be considered reliable. We couldn't find any studies of the APOLLA Snore Free, though the manufacturer supplied a testimonial.

We were told just before this article went to print that Nozovent, which was quite a visible product in pharmacies, is no longer distributed in Australia.

■ Essential oils

AROMATHERAPY CLINIC Anti Snoring Blend is a mixture of essential oils that can be dabbed on the skin, inhaled directly or diffused in an oil burner. Its claims are that it "... clears sinuses and enhances the function of the respiratory tract". Another aromatherapy product, ESSENTIAL HEALTH Helps Stop Snoring is a throat spray. Its website says it "works by re-toning this soft tissue, 'the Soft Palate', which when taut and active cannot reverberate to cause snoring".

We found two clinical trials — one (financed by the manufacturer of Helps Stop Snoring) found it effective in reducing snoring, while another

Snoring kids?

Studies indicate that in some children learning difficulties, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity are influenced by snoring and breathing difficulties at night. So if your child snores and has behavioural or learning problems, take them to a specialist.

If a weight problem is causing the snoring, this needs to be addressed with diet changes and exercise. Surgical removal of the adenoids and tonsils (adenotonsillectomy) may also be recommended for children whose snoring is caused by enlarged tonsils or adenoids.

Your child may also snore but not have behavioural and learning problems. However, if you notice that their snoring is severe or accompanied by pauses, gasps or snorts, have them tested for sleep apnoea (see below).

A researcher from the University of South Australia's Centre for Sleep Research said over-the-counter treatments shouldn't be used — their effectiveness and safety for children haven't been confirmed, and some products may interfere with a child's development.

Sleep apnoea

If your snoring is accompanied by pauses, snorts and gasps for air, get referred to a sleep specialist to be tested for sleep apnoea. Obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) is a condition where breathing stops many times during the night. Besides snoring, other symptoms include waking feeling unrefreshed, daytime sleepiness and mood swings.

OSA may be caused by carrying too much weight, anatomical factors such as enlarged tonsils, and alcohol or sedative use. Left untreated it can leave you dangerously tired, irritable, and more vulnerable to high blood pressure and coronary disease.

Diagnosis usually involves a trip to a sleep lab where you'll undergo polysomnography (tests measuring your physiological activity as you sleep).

If weight loss or avoiding alcohol and sedatives doesn't work, other treatments are available. Nasal CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) is thought to be the most effective non-invasive treatment for OSA. The CPAP machine has a nasal mask that blows air through the nose and holds the airway open, helping you breathe regularly through the night.

In some cases, surgery may be suggested. The ENT specialist we consulted said surgery can be helpful but only if it's performed on the appropriate people, such as those who aren't overweight but have a large palate that's causing obstruction.

Sleep apnoea or chronic snoring may also be treated with mandibular splints — dental appliances that can move the jaw forward or stop the tongue falling backwards. Experts say the newer appliances are more comfortable than the bulky mouthguards of old, and are good for people with apnoea who can't tolerate the CPAP machine. Mandibular splints must be prescribed by a sleep medicine or ENT specialist, who'll then refer you to a dentist and dental technician to make and fit the device.

independent trial of an unnamed essential oils product with the same ingredients showed no significant difference between the product and a placebo. The ENT specialist thought the methodology of both trials was unreliable.

We also spoke to a representative from the International Federation of Aromatherapists, who said while both these blends may clear congestion, she couldn't see how essential oils could improve poor muscle tone in the back of the throat. The professor of sleep medicine agreed there was no evidence to support this theory.

Homeopathic products

We found a couple of homeopathic throat sprays — GREEN PHARMACEUTICALS *SnoreStop* Extinguisher and BRAUER *Snore Eze*. *SnoreStop* also comes in the form of homeopathic tablets, and has a clinical trial to support its claims (again, financed by its manufacturer). BRAUER supplied a list of ingredients and their properties.

A representative from the Australian Homeopathic Association said the ingredients in these homeopathic products were listed in the *Materia Medica* — the reference book of homeopathic medicines — as some of the many possible snoring treatments, but the specific ingredient suiting a particular patient mightn't have been included. He said a homeopath would usually only prescribe the



single most appropriate medicine for the individual rather than a generalised 'one-cure-fits-all' approach.

Our ENT specialist thought the clinical trial of **SnoreStop** was poorly designed, and that one trial wasn't enough to establish if it really worked. He said the best way to determine a treatment's efficacy was via a meta-analysis — an overview of a number of studies that compares and draws conclusions from all the results.

TIPS FOR A SILENT NIGHT

If there's no convincing evidence that any of these products is effective at reducing snoring, what *can* you do? Experts say lifestyle changes are the best solution for this health condition.

- If you snore because you're overweight, get some support to help you stick to a sensible eating and exercise plan. Even moderate weight loss has been shown to reduce or stop snoring.
- Snoring is yet another good reason to quit smoking.
- Avoid sleeping pills, tranquillisers and muscle relaxants, and don't drink alcohol at least four hours before going to bed.
- If you only snore when sleeping on your back, train yourself to sleep on your side. (Wedge a pillow behind your back, or the old trick of sewing a tennis ball onto the back of your pyjama top, might work for you.)

What are they like to use?

We asked eight couples to each try one of the products — we wanted to know how easy and comfortable they thought the products were to use. While one user isn't enough to find out conclusively whether a product works, some of the snorers' partners did think the product lessened the frequency or volume of the snoring. However, the professor of sleep we consulted pointed out that in his experience, snorers' partners often report improved symptoms with placebos, so subjective observation alone wouldn't be enough to prove the product worked.

As noted elsewhere in this article, it would take a number of scientific, properly designed trials to objectively determine each product's efficacy. Our guinea pigs just told us what they're like to use.

■ **Ruth and Ivan:** Ivan, the snoring partner, said **SnoreStop Extinguisher** (a homeopathic product) was easy to use as it didn't smell or taste bad. Ruth thought Ivan's snoring was quieter at first.

■ **Nick and Alex:** Nick (right) tried the **SnoreStop** homeopathic tablets and thought they tasted fine. He and Alex noticed no effects, adverse or otherwise.

■ **Gene and Liz:** Gene thought the essential oils (aromatherapy) **Anti Snoring Blend** stopped him snoring because the smell kept him awake. Liz said, "The smell was very unpleasant for both of us." They abandoned it after one night.

■ **Dorothy and Peter:** Peter's snoring not only disturbs his partner Dorothy, but also wakes him. He tried the **BREATHE RIGHT** nasal strips, and said they were easy and comfortable to use. Dorothy thought his snoring was quieter, but Peter didn't notice any significant results.



GENE ROSS



GENE ROSS

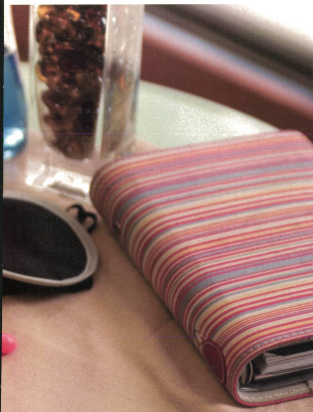
■ **Scott and Kyoko** (left): Kyoko hoped the **DICK WICKS Magnetic Anti-snore Pillow** would be more effective than her usual methods to control Scott's snoring: "I pinch his nose, turn his head, kick his legs and tell him he's snoring." However, Scott was unimpressed with the pillow — by night four he was waking up every hour with a stiff neck.

■ **Willa and Hao:** Willa and her husband Hao tried the **DENTONS**

Anti-snore Silent Knight Therapeutic Pillow. Unlike Scott, he found this pillow quite comfortable, so he slept (and snored) soundly.

■ **Antonio and Maria:** Maria tried the **Nozovent** nasal dilator, but found her nose felt like "... it was being stretched to the limit — after a while it became unbearable". The product comes in three sizes, so she may have got the wrong one.

■ **Linda and Vaughan:** Vaughan's snoring wakes Linda four or five times a week. He tried the essential oil spray **Helps Stop Snoring**, which he said tasted "unusual" but he eventually got used to it. He thought it wasn't very cost-effective. Linda thought his snoring was quieter.



If you're thinking of hiring a personal trainer to guide and motivate you, this article will help you choose a good one.

Choosing a personal trainer

IN A NUTSHELL

- Look for someone with a Certificate IV in Fitness (Personal Trainer) or equivalent, and personal trainer registration with an appropriate fitness registration body.
- However, there's more to a good personal trainer than their qualifications — interpersonal attributes are very important.

They like to tell us that having a personal trainer is no longer just for the rich and famous, though at a cost of as much as \$50–\$100 for a one-on-one session, it's a lot more expensive than your average gym workout. That's why it's important to get a good one. But a 'good' personal trainer isn't just someone who appears to know everything there is to know about exercise, diet and health — it's someone who has the necessary knowledge to help you meet your goals, with the interpersonal skills to get you motivated, make you feel at ease and make your efforts rewarding. It's someone who's right for you.

WHY HIRE A PERSONAL TRAINER?

Personal training should be a holistic, lifestyle approach to health and fitness — not just having someone make you run around for an hour! A good personal trainer can help you make the best use of your exercise time, as well as help motivate you, help you with technique (efficiency and safety), monitor your progress, adjust your exercise program in response to your changing fitness level, offer sound advice on good nutrition and vary your exercise options to keep you motivated, interested and enjoying your workouts.

Objectives can include:

- Fat/weight loss.

- Body toning and shaping.
- Strength and endurance training.
- Fitness training.
- Flexibility exercises.
- Specific forms of exercise, such as boxing, yoga or Pilates.
- Programs for children, adolescents and older adults (if the trainer is appropriately qualified).

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Good personal trainers will have undergone instruction and study in the foundations of good health and exercise, including human anatomy and physiology; biomechanics (body movement), posture and flexibility; nutrition for health and performance; and exercise physiology.

Then there's exercise and training encompassing fitness assessment, designing exercise programs, exercise instruction (including the use of equipment such as exercise balls) and techniques such as boxing.

Finally, they should be able to demonstrate they keep skills and knowledge up to date by attending continuing education courses or seminars, subscribing to relevant professional journals (in sports science or nutrition, say) or conducting research.

Many personal trainers have completed a **Certificate IV in Fitness** qualification, specialising as a personal trainer. Alternatively, they may have done a sports science or human movement degree at university, which would allow them to register as a personal trainer with the relevant association of fitness professionals if they can demonstrate they have competence in required areas.

Without this competence evaluation, though, a sports degree on its own doesn't guarantee a competent personal trainer because they may not have covered all aspects of designing and delivering personalised programs.

A Certificate IV in Fitness is also available with specialisations in older adults, children and adolescents, and advanced aqua training. It's not unusual for a personal trainer to have expertise in one or more of these areas — which may be appropriate for you — in addition to personal training.

REGISTRATION AND INSURANCE

Around 60–70% of personal trainers are registered with **Fitness Australia** through their state's registration body. Personal trainers can also register with **Kinect Australia** (incorporating **Vicfit** in Victoria).

Requirements for registration as a personal trainer include a Certificate IV in Fitness (Personal Trainer) or equivalent, and a current industry-approved first-aid certificate; continuing education or professional development credit points are required for renewal of registration every two years.

Some personal trainers choose not to register as one, yet are just as experienced and knowledgeable as a registered trainer. Unless you're experienced and knowledgeable enough to judge this for yourself, however, you're probably better off playing it safe with a registered trainer.

Personal trainers should also have public liability and professional indemnity insurance. Trainers registered with Fitness Australia or Kinect Australia have access to insurance through these bodies, though it's optional. Whether you decide to go with a registered or unregistered personal trainer, it's in your interests to check they have appropriate insurance.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Once you've established their professional credentials — that is, that they're qualified, registered and insured as a personal trainer — it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty.

- How long have they been working as a personal trainer?
 - What sort of clients have they had/do they have, and what sort of results have they helped them achieve?
- Ask for references and make sure you contact the

referees. Ask them about the trainer's good and bad (if any) points, how the trainer helped them achieve their goals, and their overall experience with them.

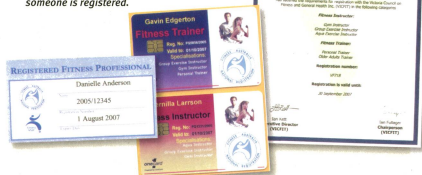
- When are they able to exercise with you, and do these days/times suit you?
- What sort of exercise options do they offer? Is it based in the open air (local park or beach), at your home or in a gym?
- How much does it cost per hour or session (per person if there are two or more of you)? Are there packages available? If the session takes place in a gym, does the fee include entry to the gym (unless you're already a member)?
- How do you pay (cash, cheque, credit card, etc) and how often (by the session, or do you have to commit yourself to paying for a block of sessions)?
- How much does the initial consultation cost? Is there a complimentary workout session (or a discount on the first week, say) to establish whether you suit each other?
- How much notice do you need to give for cancellation, and what are the penalty fees?
- If they're not registered, are they qualified in first aid and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR)? (Being up-to-date in these areas is a requirement of registration).
- How long is a session? What do you need to bring?

THE FIRST MEETING

Your first meeting will ideally take the form of a consultation, not a full-on workout. This is to allow the personal trainer to devise an appropriate program for you. Ask in advance what will happen at this session, but you'd expect something along the following lines:

- They'll ask you about your overall health and health history, including illnesses and injuries, family history and diet and nutrition issues; your health and fitness goals; and what sort of activities you enjoy.

Registered personal trainers (see Registration and insurance, above left) should have some sort of card or certificate showing this. Members of the public can also phone their state office of Fitness Australia to confirm someone is registered.





"I couldn't have done it on my own"

Around 18 months ago, Vicki Townsley of Sydney decided to quit smoking and get healthy. She'd heard about a local personal training company that

offered a 10-day 'cleanse' program and joined up. The company takes a holistic approach to diet, exercise and overall health, including mental wellbeing. She hasn't looked back since.

Personal training sessions vary in location and the types of activity. Vicki does one group session per week, which concentrates on cardio exercise (\$15), and one individual session for strength exercises in a gym (\$77, including gym fees). The company has several personal trainers, all of whom she's got to know well over her time with them.

"I'm a completely different person physically — I've gone from a size 14 to a small 12 or 10. And my body shape has changed. I've never strictly dieted — in fact I eat lots, but generally better foods than I used to eat."

She's also joined their running group — something she couldn't imagine doing when she was still smoking.

"When I started I did a short run of about 1 km and couldn't keep up with the others. But thanks to their constant help, I'm now running three times a week up to 12 km."

Vicki has no doubts that using personal trainers — rather than doing it on her own or joining a gym — was right for her.

"The trainers are very supportive and encouraging, and offer that personal touch. By varying the locations and types of exercise they keep me interested. And the individual attention keeps me motivated and challenged — you can be limited by your own knowledge and resources, but with the experts guiding you they can push you to the next level."

■ If you're over 40, haven't exercised for a long time, are overweight or have a chronic medical condition, they should recommend you get medical clearance before starting an exercise program.

■ They should assess your current fitness, which may include cardio-respiratory function tests; weight, height and body fat measurements; posture, flexibility and muscular strength.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

You need to be able to trust, respect and feel comfortable with your personal trainer, so your personal relationship is an important factor in your success. If they don't seem genuinely interested in you and your goals, make you feel overly self-conscious or embarrassed or you just don't click, it might be best to try someone else.

More obvious problems include an intimidating manner, a 'no pain, no gain' mentality, unreliability (being late for appointments or cancelling at short notice), a tendency to overwhelm you with jargon, or being more interested in your wallet than you.

If, on the other hand, they're friendly and likable, inspire your confidence in them and in yourself, communicate well, ask you plenty of questions and are happy to answer yours, and are generally pleasant to spend your time with, you're more likely to get a lot more out of your sessions.

Remember, you are paying *them*, so it's *your* choice as to whether you carry on with them.

WARNINGS

Steer clear of personal trainers who:

- Can't or won't provide proof of professional credentials and insurance.
- Can't or won't give references.
- Try to get you to commit to a long-term package before

you've had a chance to see if you're compatible.

■ Sell or insist you use dietary supplements, such as protein powders, amino acid concoctions or vitamin supplements, or magic weight loss formulas. Occasionally some of these things may be appropriate, but do your own research on them and then buy them from a shop if you're still interested.

■ Advocate useless or dangerous exercise or weight loss techniques, including fasting, passive exercise devices (such as abdominal electric shock devices or vibrating belts) and procedures that cause fluid loss such as saunas or wraps to give the impression of weight loss (but which in fact will largely make you lose water for a time, not fat).

■ Advise you in areas where they're not qualified — for example, for in-depth nutrition advice and special diets, they should refer you to a dietitian.

■ Promise immediate and spectacular results — realistically you'd expect to see some sort of improvement in around six weeks.

■ Don't look as though they practise what they preach — a good role model will look fit and healthy. ■

FITNESS AUSTRALIA AND KINECT AUSTRALIA OFFICES

- Fitness ACT: (02) 6248 5934.
- Fitness NSW: (02) 9460 6200.
- Fitness Queensland and Fitness NT: (07) 3876 6522.
- Fitness SA/Recreation SA: (08) 8232 6477.
- Fitness Tasmania: (03) 6224 8324.
- Fitness Victoria: 1300 363 060.
- Fitness WA: (08) 9383 7734.
- www.fitnessaustralia.com.au (with links to state websites).
- Kinect Australia (Incorporating Vicfit in Victoria): (03) 8320 0100, www.vicfit.com.au

PESTICIDES IN FRUIT AND VEG

Are they harmless — or
is the truth that we don't
really know?

Google 'pesticides' and you'll score more than 20 million hits; do it for 'pesticides' and 'cancer' and you'll still get about three million. Scare stories abound and when the pollsters ask consumers about food safety, pesticides often come up as a major concern.

But our food regulators assure us the levels of pesticide residues in our food are well within international safety standards, and that there are no significant risks from eating them. At the same time, opponents of the use of pesticides are claiming they put us at risk of cancer and possibly other health problems such as Parkinson's disease and impaired cognitive development in children. Who's right?

THE BACKGROUND

About 300 different pesticides are registered in Australia for use on fruit and vegetable crops. Some are applied to crops while they're growing; others are used to protect produce after it's harvested. Without pesticides it's claimed crop yields would decline, costs would increase, and fruit and vegetables would end up with more grubs and mould — and it's true that organic food (produced without the use of synthetic pesticides) is usually more expensive and crop yields are lower.

On the other hand, the overall benefits of pesticides may not be as great as their supporters would have us believe. For example, Cornell University's Professor David Pimentel has estimated that, despite the huge amounts applied worldwide, pesticide use probably saves only around 10% of the world food supply. His calculations also suggest that the cost of the environmental and public health damage caused by pesticides exceeds their benefits.

CHOICE can't resolve this argument, but given there's so little certainty we did take a look at what our food regulators are doing about potential risks from pesticides.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

If you're a farmer, or you use pesticides in your garden, you'll have seen some dire warnings on the labels. Pesticides can be distinctly nasty (some of them are based on chemical warfare agents developed during the Second World War), so it's not surprising there's a lot of published research on their toxicity.

Some experts say the research results show little or no risk, while others argue that pesticides are toxic even at very low levels. The issue has become highly controversial. Passions are aroused on

IN A NUTSHELL

- **There's no convincing evidence that pesticide residues are bad for your health at the very low levels permitted in fruit, vegetables and other foods. But the research isn't conclusive — pesticides that were once thought safe have been subsequently banned, or their use restricted.**
- **You can minimise your exposure to pesticide residues by buying organic produce, peeling conventionally grown fruit before you eat it, and discarding the outer leaves of produce like lettuce.**

SUPERMARKET FRUIT AND VEG

■ **WOOLWORTHS** told us the majority of its fresh produce is Australian-grown and complies with FSANZ regulations. Imported items are further tested for pesticides by Woolworths Quality Assurance.

■ **COLES** didn't respond to our enquiries.

both sides — and it's all too easy to selectively quote studies that support your point of view.

There's another factor to take into account when trying to discuss pesticide use rationally: the 'outrage effect'. Science isn't everything when it comes to risk. To most of us (including scientists on their days off) how we rate risk also depends on various 'outrage' factors. For example, we're more likely to be outraged by risks over which we have little choice or control. Skiing's risky but fun because we choose to do it and believe we're skilful enough to avoid accidents.

So even though in reality eating food contaminated by pesticide residues is no more risky than driving to the supermarket, we're more concerned about the pesticides because most of us choose to go by car. And we're exposed every day to natural toxins in foods that are a lot riskier than pesticides — potatoes, for example, can contain toxic alkaloids (especially if they're a tad green), mushrooms contain hydrazines that can cause cancer and barbecued meat is another source of cancer-causing toxins. But these are familiar foods; we're comfortable with the risks and there's no outrage.

However, there are some real concerns:

■ **Scientific uncertainty.** It's important to remember that, while science delivers more or less reliable knowledge, there's an element of uncertainty in all research findings. This is a particular concern in studies of pesticide toxicity because the levels allowed in foods are so small that harmful effects may not be immediately obvious. There can be a long time lag between exposure to a carcinogen, for example, and someone developing cancer (as was found with asbestos and cigarette smoke).

So while the risks from pesticide residues now seem very low, there's always the chance that

pesticides currently believed to be safe may one day be revealed as hazardous. This was the case with DDT, which was once widely used as a pesticide and is now banned.

■ **The cocktail effect.** While most experts agree that the risk of cancer from individual pesticides is very low, others are concerned that exposure to a 'cocktail' of pesticides may increase the risk. A report recently published in the UK by its Food Standards Agency upheld the scientific validity of these concerns and called for more research.

SAFETY MEASURES

All foods sold in Australia must comply with the Food Standards Code, which defines maximum residue limits (MRL) for pesticides permitted in specific foods. The MRL is determined from a number of factors including:

- How much of the food is eaten in the average diet.
- How toxic the pesticide is.
- How easily the food absorbs the pesticide.

In theory, at least, foods can't be sold if they contain pesticides that haven't been specifically approved for that food or if the level of pesticide exceeds the MRL. But can we be sure that our food complies with the regulations?

HOW WELL IS YOUR FOOD TESTED?

Unfortunately how well your food's being tested depends on where you live. Testing for pesticide residues is mostly left to the states. Regular testing is beyond the resources of the smaller states and territories and most of the testing that's done by the larger states is on local produce only. Imported fruit and vegies mostly escape the net altogether (see *Lax approach to imports too*, left).

■ **The ACT and Tasmania** do no testing at all.

■ **The NSW Department of Primary Industry** has a new testing program, with funding for five years, but it only looks at local produce. There's no regular testing of produce at the point of entry or from retail outlets, so imported produce isn't tested.

■ **The NT Department of Primary Industry** tests locally grown produce.

■ **The Queensland Department of Primary Industry** regularly tests samples from suppliers (and occasionally farmers' markets), but does no testing of produce from retail outlets.

■ **SA** tested locally produced fruit and vegetables in 2003 but isn't currently doing any testing at all.

■ **Victoria** regularly tests locally produced fruit and vegetables but doesn't take samples from retail outlets.

■ **The WA Department of Health** has an ongoing testing program and does surveys of fruit and

Lax approach to imports too

With increasing globalisation, fresh food imports are growing and we now import fresh fruit and vegetables worth more than \$180 million a year.

The approach to testing local produce seems lax enough, but there are also concerns that imported produce, some of which comes from countries known to have a less stringent approach than Australia to the use of agricultural chemicals, may be contaminated with pesticides that either aren't permitted here or are at unsafe levels. Supporting this concern, surveys in the UK have found its imported food is more likely to contain detectable levels of pesticide residues than its local produce.

However, 95% of imported fruit and vegetables come into the country with no independent testing for pesticide residues. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) is responsible for ensuring that imports comply with the Food Standards Code. A small 'snapshot' survey found no imports with pesticides in excess of the MRL, but AQIS normally only tests a small number of consignments, and then only for a limited range of pesticides.

vegetables every two to five years. The current survey is sampling from retail outlets, including the big supermarket chains.

In the UK about 4000 food samples each year are tested, with an annual surveillance program covering dietary staples (bread, milk and potatoes) and a rolling program that tests different fruit and vegetables, cereal products and other foods every few years. (Testing is partly funded by a levy on the sales of pesticides.) In the USA, the Food and Drug Administration regularly tests representative foods from four geographic regions of the country.

Our national regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), has checked foods for pesticide residues in the past as part of the *Australian Total Dietary Survey*. Because residues have consistently been found to be well below maximum limits, it now focuses on what it believes to be higher-risk areas, such as preservatives, but will continue to check pesticide residues from time to time.

The Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry regularly tests for pesticides as part of the *National Residue Survey*, but the program is aimed at foods for export and the only fruit and vegetables tested are locally produced apples, pears, blueberries and onions that are for both local and export consumption.

CHOICE is concerned that there's so little independent testing for pesticide residues. Particularly for imported products it's surely naive to believe that producers and importers will always voluntarily comply with Australia's Food Standards Code. The rules need to be enforced.

We'd like to see regular, systematic testing on a national basis. This would avoid wasteful duplication of effort by the states and could be funded by a levy on the sale of pesticides (as in the UK).

HOW TO AVOID PESTICIDES

The foods most likely to contain pesticide residues are fresh fruit and vegetables. Of those tested for the 2003 *Australian Total Dietary Survey*, the products with the highest levels were **lettuce** and **strawberries** — if pesticides worry you, it's worth putting them at the top of your organic shopping list. Processed foods (such as tomato purée) generally have fewer pesticide residues because a combination of washing, blanching and cooking removes the majority of pesticide residues from vegetables and fruit.

If you're concerned about pesticide residues, don't cut down on fruit and vegies — the risk to

your health from eating less of them would far outweigh any risks posed by possible pesticide exposure. Instead:

■ **Peel.** Pesticides are often formulated to resist being washed off easily (so as to survive rain showers). Peeling removes residues from pesticides that stay on the surface of fruit, but you'll be throwing away valuable nutrients in the peel at the same time — the choice is yours.

■ Some pesticides are systemic, which means they penetrate the flesh of the fruit or vegetable, so washing isn't effective against these pesticide residues (though it's a good idea to wash them anyway to remove dirt and potentially harmful bacteria). But it helps to **throw away the outer leaves** of leafy vegetables such as lettuce or cabbage.

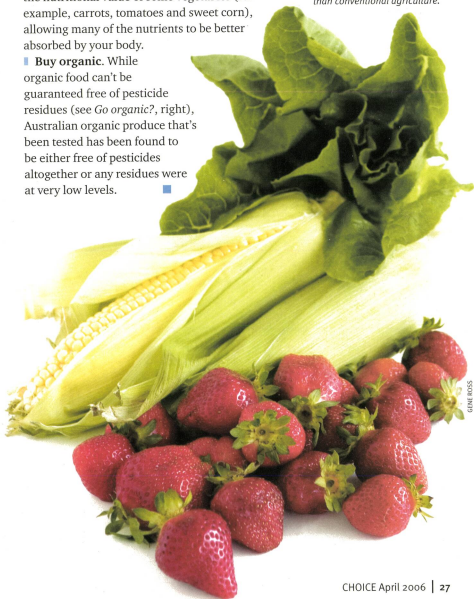
■ **Cook.** Processing, including cooking, can break down some pesticide residues. Cooking can destroy some vitamins but it also improves the nutritional value of some vegetables (for example, carrots, tomatoes and sweet corn), allowing many of the nutrients to be better absorbed by your body.

■ **Buy organic.** While organic food can't be guaranteed free of pesticide residues (see *Go organic?*, right), Australian organic produce that's been tested has been found to be either free of pesticides altogether or any residues were at very low levels. ■

GO ORGANIC

Organic food is grown without the use of artificial pesticides. While it's not necessarily completely free of pesticide residues (some may have lingered in the soil from previous non-organic crops, for example), independent testing has consistently found much lower levels than in conventionally grown produce. And a recent study in the US confirmed that an organic diet there substantially reduces children's exposure to pesticides from foods.

While there's little evidence that organic food tastes better or is of higher nutritional value, organic farming is believed to be better for the environment than conventional agriculture.



Storage to go

On test: 16 USB keys



USB keys, also called USB flash drives, are becoming popular for transporting data from computer to computer. Like their predecessor, the floppy disc, they're highly portable and can be used with most computers. Unlike the floppy, they come in a range of capacities, shapes and sizes, can incorporate various security software products and are less likely to jam or lose your vital data. *Computer CHOICE* put 256MB USB keys to the test.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

They come in a wide variety of shapes and colours but, aesthetics aside, you should pay attention to the width, depth and length for some simple practical reasons. They connect to your computer using a USB connection and you could run into problems if your key is too big to use when another, adjacent USB connection is in use.

PRODUCTS TESTED

ASTONE Flash Drive 256MB — 80x
COMSOL FlashIT2
CORSAIR Flash Voyager
GIGABYTE Flash Disk
IMATION USB 2.0 Swivel Flash Drive
KINGMAX MaxDrive I
KINGSTON Data Traveler II
LEXAR Jump Drive Elite

PQI Cool Drive
PRETEC I-Disk Tiny Luxury
SANDISK Cruiser Micro
SHINTARO USB 2.0 Pocket Disk
SONY MicroVault Elite USM256E
SONY MicroVault Mini USM256D
SUPER FLASH USB 2.0 Flash Memory Drive
TRANSCEND JetFlash 110

USB keys should also be long enough to allow you a good grip when putting them into the computer, and have a light that's bright and positioned so you can see when the key is in use. If you remove the key while you're transferring data there's a good chance you'll damage or lose files, or possibly even be unable to read any of the data on the key.

Most products come with a cap to protect the connector from dirt and moisture; others are retractable or have a rotating cover. A lanyard or carry strap is very useful, particularly if you're constantly transferring files from one device to another. It helps to reduce the potential for loss or damage, but should be of a practical length and strong enough to last a reasonable time.

Data transfer speeds can vary greatly, depending on whether you're moving large or small files. When you transfer files to a USB key it has to organise them so they can be retrieved, which can slow it down substantially if there are lots of relatively small files, such as images from a digital camera or MP3 files.

EASY TO DAMAGE?

Over an extended period of use a USB key's likely to be dropped, left in bags that are knocked and dropped and subjected to any number of other abuses — particularly if it's used by children to carry assignments to and from school. We put the keys in a cloth bag and placed it in a drum that was rotated for a total of six hours to determine which product was the most robust. The keys were checked for any physical damage and functionality after one, two, four and six hours. Most suffered only aesthetic damage.

If you'd like to subscribe to *Computer CHOICE*, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

WHAT TO BUY

Based on a combination of ease of use, robustness and performance:

CORSAIR Flash Voyager	\$51
KINGSTON Data Traveler II	\$55

Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in February 2006.

The CORSAIR is the bulkiest USB key in the test, but it's water-resistant and has excellent scores for everything except design. Its lanyard is functional (if 'loud'), and our testers felt the soft lid could easily be lost, which would negate its water resistance.

The KINGSTON scores well in most areas. It's slower than all the rest of the products in the test when reading lots of small files from the USB key to the computer, but its overall speed is still acceptable.



PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

Enough pixels already!

Digital cameras

For some time now there's been an emphasis from manufacturers and advertisers on a digital camera's pixel rating. It's easy to imply that more pixels equal a better product, but it isn't necessarily so.

One area where megapixels do matter is the size of print you want to end up with. For most consumers a five or six megapixel camera will provide plenty of scope to print and manipulate anything from normal-sized prints to at least as big as an A4 page. So for this report we picked all the cameras currently tested up to 6.1 megapixels and came up with some of the best for different purposes.

CHECK EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION

There's nothing very complicated about megapixels — they're just a convenient shorthand way of indicating how many pixels (dots) the image contains. In all CHOICE's calculations and descriptions we use 'effective resolution', which refers to the total number of dots in the image, not the total number of points that the sensor uses to collect light information. The latter is always bigger because it includes collection points that are used for tasks like error correction and aren't included in the final image.

To see what effective resolution a camera delivers, you simply multiply the horizontal and vertical number of pixels (dots) in an image taken at the camera's largest image size and best quality setting. For example, an image with 2590 x 1920 pixels (4,972,800) is rounded up to be expressed as 5 megapixels — mega meaning million. This information is almost always stored with the image when it's taken and can often be seen using the image manipulation software supplied with the camera.

Although many manufacturers are now labelling their cameras with effective resolution, some aren't, so it pays to look at the camera's specifications if print size matters to you.

PRINT SIZE AND MEGAPIXELS

In the good old days of film (not so long ago really), if you wanted to make a large print, you probably chose a film that had small, unobtrusive grain. You can't just slip a different film into your digital camera, so you have to choose one that will let you make prints at the maximum size you're likely to need, even if you're unlikely to do it very often.

If you print a digital image at a size much above its maximum it's likely to look very blotchy and unnatural. Use the table on page 31 as a rough guide to the print size you can expect from a given number of effective megapixels.

On the other hand, you can always reduce the image size the camera records, if you know you only want to make small prints or look at them onscreen. This will save on storage because the more pixels in the image, the bigger the file.



IN A NUTSHELL

- **Megapixels are about size, not quality.** It's the combination of the lens, processor and other parts of the camera that influences quality.
- **Use effective resolution, not total megapixels, when comparing cameras.**
- **Make sure you buy a camera with enough megapixels to print at the biggest size you're likely to need.**

What to buy



OVERALL

CANON POWERSHOT S2 IS

Price: \$699

This camera has lasted longer than most in a volatile market because it gets some of the basics right.

It has a 12x zoom (36–432 mm), short shutter delay (0.35 seconds) and takes around 2.37 seconds to go from switched off to ready to take a photo ('start-up'), which means you probably won't miss too many unexpected shots. Its battery life is excellent and it can be used in a wide variety of situations. It also has all the other requirements we list for a sports model, far right, which is why it's in the *What to buy* list twice.

Although its image quality scores aren't as good as the others in the *What to buy* list, overall it's a good performer.



BUDGET

CANON POWERSHOT A520

Price: \$329 (discontinued, but still available in shops for a short time)

Although not the cheapest in the test — the OLYMPUS FE-100 (\$199) has that honour — this camera provides a good compromise between price and functionality. Its image quality scores are as good as many models that cost significantly more and it can be used in a variety of modes such as portrait, landscape or sports settings, as well as having manual controls on top of its automatic ones.

The main trade-offs for the price are a smallish 3x zoom (35–140 mm) and only 3.9 megapixels. Neither of these is a major fault if all you need is a basic compact camera for snaps.

FLAT, SMALL AND LIGHT

CANON DIGITAL IXUS 55

Price: \$629

SONY CYBERSHOT DSC-T5

Price: \$549

PANASONIC LUMIX DMC-FX8

Price: \$659



It's all about style in this category. These three cameras weigh less than six AA batteries and will easily fit in a pocket, but still manage to be very functional cameras. They may look pretty, but they're not toys. As you may have noticed from their prices.

■ The **SONY** has a slightly longer zoom than the other two, virtually no shutter delay (0.19 seconds) and comes with 32 MB of internal memory, but it has no viewfinder so you have to rely on the monitor to frame your shot. Its battery and movie quality scores are lower than the other two.

■ The **PANASONIC** also lacks a viewfinder and has the slowest shutter delay (0.48 seconds) but the best movie quality score of the three.

■ The **CANON** has the best overall score of the three and an excellent battery score. It also has an optical viewfinder as well as a monitor, and very little shutter delay (0.29 seconds).

None of them allows manual settings for shutter and aperture, or for continuous focus.

SPORTS

CANON POWERSHOT S2 IS

Price: \$699 (see its photo far left)

SONY CYBERSHOT DSC-H1

Price: \$799 (discontinued, but still available in shops for a short time)



Good sports photography is about getting close to the action and reacting quickly. Both these cameras have very long 12x zoom lenses (36–432 mm), image stabilisation to help you get the photo without too much shake, and continuous manual focus and other manual settings so you can select the point of focus and control the exposure in tricky situations.

The **CANON** is a little quicker to start up (2.37 seconds) than the **SONY** (3 seconds) and has less shutter delay, but the **SONY** has better overall image quality (see the table, page 32, for details).

Megapixels and print size

Printing at 200 dots per inch (dpi) is plenty for inkjet printers and most minilabs. However, commercial printing (such as this magazine) is usually done at around 300 dpi, so you may see some smaller print sizes quoted on that basis.

Megapixels	Print size (cm at 200 dpi)
3.1	26 x 19.5
4	29.3 x 22
5	32.9 x 24.6
6	38.2 x 25.4
7.1	39 x 29.3
8	41.5 x 31.1



GENE ROOS

NOTES FOR THE TABLE, OVERLEAF

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following scores:

- Image quality (auto and manual are equal): 30%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Versatility: 12%
- Viewfinder/monitor: 12%
- Battery life: 10%
- Flash: 8%
- Movie quality: 3%

2–8 Scores

See CHOICE, April 2005, for what was tested to achieve these scores, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Apr 05 under 'Digital cameras' in the index.

9 Features

Video out: A connection that allows you to look at your photos or movies on TV.

Manual aperture/shutter: Aperture controls the depth of field in your picture, allowing you to determine which parts of the image are in or out of focus. Setting the shutter speed manually is handy if you're taking photos of fast-moving objects or to compensate for low light. All models have automatic aperture and shutter adjustment.

Continuous manual focusing: All the cameras in this test have autofocus, but manual focus is useful for situations such as low light and

subjects behind glass or with little contrast. Continuous manual focus is more useful than a number of preset distances, as it allows for more precise control.

10 Resolution

See Check effective resolution, page 29.

11 Zoom range

12 Viewfinder type

13 Shutter delay

See CHOICE, April 2005, for an explanation of these, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Apr 05 under 'Digital cameras' in the index.

14 Supplied memory type

- Int: Internal memory.
- xD: xD Card.
- MS: Memory Stick; MS Duo: small format; MS Pro: higher capacity and transfer speed.
- SD: Secure Digital card.
- CF I, II: Compact Flash Type I or II.

15 Batteries

Ni-MH and Li-Ion batteries are rechargeable. However, it's also useful to be able to use normal alkalines if you're caught short of power and don't have time to recharge.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE									9 FEATURES	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Auto image quality score (%)	2 Manual image quality score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Versatility score (%)	5 Viewfinder/monitor score (%)	6 Battery life score (%)	7 Flash score (%)	8 Movie quality score (%)	Video out	Manual shutter
CANON PowerShot S2 IS	74	57	58	77	88	71	100	81	71	✓	✓ / ✓
CANON PowerShot A610 (A)	72	60	68	72	84	57	100	75	63	✓	✓ / ✓
SONY CyberShot DSC-H1 (A)	72	59	64	75	84	68	89	81	47	✓	✓ / ✓
PANASONIC Lumix DMC-FZ5	71	63	67	66	74	71	87	92	64	✓	✓ / ✓
CANON PowerShot A520 (A)	70	60	66	67	79	58	100	79	63	✓	✓ / ✓
SONY CyberShot DSC-W5 (A)	70	61	65	73	70	58	94	76	51	✓	✓ / ✓
CANON Digital Ixus 55	69	61	68	69	69	54	100	77	65	✓	✓ / -
FUJIFILM FinePix F10	69	69	74	67	50	62	100	71	66	✓	✓ / -
FUJIFILM FinePix S5600	69	53	57	74	67	66	100	75	59	✓	✓ / ✓
OLYMPUS µ Digital 500	69	67	67	67	54	74	100	73	41	✓	✓ / -
OLYMPUS SP-500UZ	68	70	71	64	73	62	87	66	34	✓	✓ / ✓
SONY CyberShot DSC-T5	68	62	65	73	52	65	89	78	50	✓	✓ / -
KODAK EASYSHARE P850	67	66	66	59	78	65	82	65	63	✓	✓ / ✓
NIKON Coolpix 4600 (A)	67	67	70	67	56	58	100	55	45	✓	✓ / -
NIKON Coolpix P2	67	69	69	67	63	57	89	64	43	✓	✓ / -
PANASONIC Lumix DMC-FX8	67	55	61	71	60	67	93	63	71	✓	✓ / -
KONICA MINOLTA Dimage Z6	66	57	66	66	70	57	83	77	30	✓	✓ / ✓
RICOH Caplio R3	66	62	64	67	59	59	91	70	35	✓	✓ / -
SAMSUNG Digimax U-CA5	65	66	70	56	55	68	100	56	61	✓	✓ / -
CANON PowerShot A410 (A)	64	58	65	64	48	53	100	72	49	✓	✓ / -
CASIO Exilim EX-Z110	64	62	69	63	66	45	75	81	44	✓	✓ / ✓
FUJIFILM FinePix Z1	64	59	64	66	35	60	100	65	68	✓	✓ / -
NIKON Coolpix S1	64	67	64	65	53	62	93	52	33	✓	✓ / -
NIKON Coolpix S4	64	62	69	64	67	53	78	61	32	✓	✓ / -
FUJIFILM FinePix F460	63	60	59	66	39	65	100	59	53	✓	✓ / -
SONY CyberShot DSC-T7	63	55	60	77	57	68	58	61	43	✓	✓ / -
CANON Digital Ixus I Zoom	62	54	63	64	51	60	100	45	42	✓	✓ / -
KODAK EASYSHARE Z740	61	59	58	62	56	63	65	74	58	✓	✓ / ✓
NIKON Coolpix L1	61	59	63	56	54	61	89	60	38	✓	✓ / -
OLYMPUS µ-mini Digital S	61	64	60	64	51	63	73	58	39	✓	✓ / -
PANASONIC Lumix DMC-LZ2	61	59	64	50	62	63	71	80	53	✓	✓ / -
KONICA MINOLTA Dimage X60	60	67	64	62	57	63	42	64	42	✓	✓ / -
OLYMPUS FE-120 (A)	60	70	63	56	31	56	81	74	44	✓	✓ / -
OLYMPUS µ-mini Digital	59	64	60	60	51	60	60	62	42	✓	✓ / -
JVC Everio G2-MC500E	58	54	57	60	77	68	29	35	94	✓	✓ / ✓
OLYMPUS IR-300	58	65	60	55	43	63	66	58	38	✓	✓ / -
SAMSUNG Digimax i5	56	60	65	40	58	63	61	63	58	✓	✓ / -
KODAK EASYSHARE One	52	53	55	49	46	50	50	72	58	✓	✓ / -
KODAK EASYSHARE C340	51	53	51	53	42	59	39	64	43	✓	✓ / -
OLYMPUS FE-100 (A)	50	54	58	49	26	48	57	65	36	✓	✓ / -
KODAK EASYSHARE V550	49	54	51	36	47	55	47	66	54	✓	✓ / -

* If there's no viewfinder you use the monitor to frame the shot.

** Size includes all protruding parts when the camera is switched off.

† Including battery, memory card and neck strap where applicable.

†† Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in February 2006.

(A) Discontinued, but still available in shops for a short time.

(B) But not at the same time.

(C) Can use normal alkaline batteries as well.

SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous annual cusing	10 Effective resolution (megapixels)	11 Zoom range (mm)	12 Viewfinder type*	Monitor size (W x H, mm)	13 Shutter delay (sec)	14 Supplied memory (MB) / type	15 No. / type of batteries	Size (W x H x D, cm) **	Weight (g)†	Price (\$)/††
	5.0	36-432	LCD	36 x 27	0.35	16 / SD	4 x AA	11.5 x 8 x 8.5	547	699
	5.0	35-140	Optical	39 x 30	0.27	16 / SD	4 x AA	11 x 7 x 5	300	499
	5.0	36-432	LCD	49 x 37	0.53	Int 32 / MS	2 x AA Ni-MH (C)	11.5 x 8.5 x 10	536	799
	4.9	36-432	LCD	36 x 27	0.72	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	12 x 7 x 9.5	353	769
	3.9	35-140	Optical	36 x 27	0.67	16 / SD	2 x AA	9.5 x 7 x 4	238	329
	5.0	38-114	Optical	49 x 37	0.18	Int 32 / MS	2 x AA Ni-MH (C)	10 x 6.5 x 4	255	499
	5.0	35-105	Optical	49 x 37	0.29	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	8.5 x 6 x 2.5	155	629
	6.1	36-108	None	49 x 37	0.31	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6.5 x 3.5	203	549
	5.0	38-380	LCD	35 x 27	0.16	16 / xD	4 x AA	12 x 8.5 x 13.5	520	549
	4.9	35-105	None	47 x 36	0.54	Int 12 + 32 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6 x 3.5	203	399
	5.9	38-380	LCD	49 x 37	0.70	Int 10 / xD	4 x AA	11 x 7.5 x 8	430	599
	5.0	38-114	None	49 x 37	0.19	Int 32 / MS Duo	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6.5 x 2.3	135	549
	5.0	36-432	LCD	49 x 36	0.93	Int 32 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	12 x 9 x 9.5	495	699
	3.9	35-105	Optical	35 x 26	0.53	Int 14 / SD	2 x AA	9 x 6.5 x 4	192	299
	5.0	36-126	None	49 x 36	0.52	Int 16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6.5 x 4	185	499
	4.9	35-105	None	49 x 37	0.48	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 2.7	154	659
	5.9	35-420	LCD	39 x 29	0.63	16 / SD	4 x AA	11 x 8.5 x 9.5	490	599
	5.0	28-200	None	49 x 37	0.63	Int 26 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 3	161	549
	5.0	35-105	None	36 x 27	1.02	32 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10.5 x 6 x 3.5	162	399
	3.1	41-131	Optical	30 x 22	0.48	16 / SD	2 x AA	10.5 x 5.5 x 4	215	229
	5.9	38-114	Optical	39 x 29	0.36	Int 8.7 / SD	2 x AA	9.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	188	399
	5.0	36-108	None	49 x 37	0.27	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 2	149	499
	5.0	35-105	None	49 x 37	0.64	Int 12 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6 x 2	138	399
	5.9	38-380	None	49 x 36	0.57	Int 14 / SD	2 x AA	11.5 x 4 x 7	270	599
	5.0	35-105	None	49 x 37	0.46	Int 13 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6.5 x 2.4	138	399
	5.0	38-114	None	50 x 37	0.01	32 / MS Duo	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6.5 x 1.8	136	699
	5.0	38-90	None	36 x 27	0.48	16 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 4.5 x 2.5	123	499
	5.0	38-380	LCD	36 x 27	0.59	Int 32 / SD	2 x AA	10.5 x 8 x 8.5	368	399
	5.9	38-190	None	49 x 37	0.90	Int 10 / SD	2 x AA Ni-MH (C)	9.5 x 6.5 x 5	240	449
	4.9	35-70	None	34 x 26	0.56	16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 5.5 x 3	132	399
	4.9	37-222	None	39 x 29	1.13	Int 14 / SD	2 x AA	10.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	245	549
	4.9	38-114	None	49 x 37	0.76	Int 15 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9 x 6 x 2.5	140	449
	5.9	38-114	None	36 x 27	0.75	Int 13.5 + 32 / xD	2 x AA	11 x 6 x 4	196	349
	3.9	35-70	None	34 x 25	0.70	Int 16 + 16 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6 x 3	134	299
	4.9	48-340	None	36 x 27	0.31	4000 / CF, I, II, SD	1 x Li-Ion	8 x 5.5 x 11.5	400	2799
	4.9	38-114	None	39 x 29	0.91	Int 12 / xD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 5.5 x 2.3	129	399
	5.0	39-117	None	49 x 37	1.32	Int 50 + 256 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	9.5 x 6 x 1.9	161	499
	4.0	36-108	None	60 x 45	0.64	Int 256 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	11 x 6.5 x 3	265	899
	5.0	34-102	Optical	31 x 24	0.78	Int 16 / SD	2 x AA	9.5 x 7 x 4	204	299
	3.9	38-106	None	31 x 23	1.02	Int 28 / xD	2 x AA	9.5 x 6.5 x 4.5	195	199
	5.0	36-108	Optical	50 x 38	1.41	Int 32 / SD	1 x Li-Ion	10 x 6 x 2.5	161	499

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Virtually every cosmetic ingredient has at some stage been tested on animals, so you won't easily find a cosmetic product that contains nothing ever tested this way.**

■ **However, there are lists of products that come close (see Preferred products lists, far right), and a few other actions you can take to tell relatively cruelty-free products from the rest.**

■ **Despite major reductions in testing cosmetics on animals, many new cosmetic ingredients are probably still being tested this way.**

Even if wearing eyeshadow or lipstick isn't your thing, by the time you leave home in the morning you're likely to have used a number of cosmetics and toiletry products — from soap, shampoo and toothpaste to deodorant, moisturiser or shaving cream. All of these you can generally rely on to be safe if used as intended. Some of them, though, might have been tested on animals in order to establish that.

There are arguments for and against animal testing in research, teaching and product safety testing. Determining the safety of non-essential cosmetics such as make-up and perfume, however, seems to some people an unjustifiable use of an animal's life and many consumers want to find cosmetics whose ingredients haven't been tested in this way — especially now alternative testing methods have been developed (see *Finding reliable alternatives*, page 37).

Unfortunately for these consumers, it's not that easy.

NOT MADE IN OZ

Animal testing for cosmetic purposes is effectively banned in all Australian states, except in special circumstances with ministerial approval. In fact, no Australian, EU or US regulations specifically require

that cosmetics (the finished products) are tested on animals, as long as suppliers can provide evidence for their *ingredients'* safety — which for some aspects may have required animal testing.

All states and territories also have some kind of animal protection legislation, but apart from a national code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, there's no national approach to animal welfare, or a national database on animal experimentation.

With most cosmetics developed and made overseas, though, the lack of information available here isn't the major problem.

RUBBERY CLAIMS

While labelling claims on cosmetics must comply with various state and federal laws, the use of terms such as 'not tested on animals' or 'against animal testing' on cosmetics packaging isn't specifically regulated. And as most of the testing occurs during the supply chain, not while making the finished product, it's possible for manufacturers, without breaching the regulations, to take certain liberties with the interpretation of such claims.

So a manufacturer claiming its products are 'not tested on animals' might be telling the strict truth,

Cosmetics: safe *and* cruelty-free?

What's the progress on cruelty-free cosmetics?

but the ingredients, or some of them, might have been tested this way; or perhaps the manufacturer has stopped animal testing, but doesn't know about its suppliers' policies.

PREFERRED PRODUCTS LISTS

To help you identify the cosmetics manufacturers that are genuinely committed to ending the practice of animal testing in their industry, various animal welfare organisations produce lists of 'cruelty-free' brands and products. These help you assess the cosmetics you use and find suitable replacements if you want to.

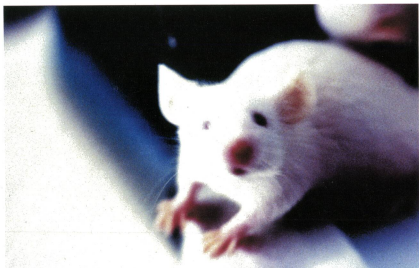
The most relevant list for the Australian market — and probably the one based on the most stringent inclusion criteria — is the Choose Cruelty Free (CCF) Preferred Products List (PPL). It contains brand names of CCF-accredited companies that use no cruelly derived ingredients, including by-products of the fur industry, and have complied with one of CCF's two non-animal-testing criteria: the 'never tested' or 'five year (+) rolling' rules.

The 'never tested rule' applies to companies that have guaranteed that none of their products, or the ingredients used, have ever been tested on animals on their behalf. The 'five year (+) rolling rule' relates to ingredients that haven't been tested on animals within the five years preceding application for accreditation.

For CCF accreditation and inclusion on the PPL, a manufacturer must fill in a comprehensive questionnaire and sign an official declaration that the information provided is true. Listing on the PPL is free of charge; use of the 'Choose Cruelty Free' bunny incurs a licensing fee. The list also indicates which brands' products are suitable for vegans. For a free copy, phone (03) 9328 1377 or download it at www.choosecrueltyfree.org.au.

The US-based People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) provides two lists of companies that do and don't test on animals. To get on the 'don't test' list, companies must sign a statement of assurance (or provide a statement verifying) that they, and their suppliers, don't conduct or commission any animal tests on ingredients, formulations or finished products, from a date they determine, and pledge not to do so in the future. PETA's lists can be downloaded at www.caringconsumer.org.

Other organisations that provide lists include the Coalition of Consumer Information on Cosmetics, based in the US (CCIC, www.leapingbunny.org), and the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV, www.buav.org). However, these lists seem less relevant to the Australian market.



NOT ON THE LIST?

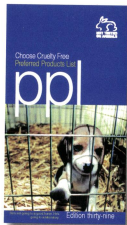
If you can't find a product on any of the lists mentioned above, you can check with the manufacturer or Australian distributor yourself. Ask for answers to specific questions: don't just accept a generic 'our products are cruelty-free' statement (see *Rubbery claims*, left, for some of the complexities of the claims).

You'll have to base your decision whether to trust the company's claims on the response you receive. We'd be surprised if a large company would lie outright and risk losing the public's confidence if it was found out, although it has happened in other areas. If you only get a vague response, or none at all, there may be grounds for scepticism, especially if the product contains 'new' ingredients, which are regularly introduced in the competitive cosmetics market.

You can also check with CCF. It told us it has approached all relevant companies it knows of, but many have ignored its approaches, including some that claim to be cruelty-free. "When consumers send companies a letter inquiring about that, they say no, definitely not, but they just don't reply to our questionnaire," we were told.

Interestingly, we too received no response from the one company we checked out. (A Google search for 'animal testing cosmetics Australia' had identified only three cosmetics companies on the first few pages of search results: AVON, LUSH and THE BODY SHOP.) As the last two of these are included on the PPL, but AVON isn't (although it's on PETA's 'don't test' list), we asked AVON (in Australia) ourselves why it wasn't included on the list, considering it promotes its non-animal-testing policy on its website. We were offered an information pack, but no-one answered our questions on the phone or responded to the voicemail message we left and the email we

The Choose Cruelty Free Preferred Products List is the Australian guide if you want to know which cosmetics haven't been tested on animals.





submitted upon request. This non-response is disappointing, considering AVON was one of the first major companies to announce in 1989 a permanent end to all animal testing on its products, received a Recognition Award in 1993 from the Johns Hopkins Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing in the US, and in 2005 an award from PETA.

A lack of response from a company you've contacted doesn't necessarily indicate that it's still involved in animal testing, at some level or other. A reluctance to publicly state a non-animal-testing policy could also stem from fear of potential misleading advertising claims, as the company mightn't know of all suppliers' testing policies. Or it might fear possible product liability claims if some users experienced adverse reactions, if it admitted its products hadn't been tested on animals. As we said at the beginning, it's not easy to get a straight answer.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

■ If you decide against buying a product because of the brand's involvement in or lack of transparency about animal testing, let the company know. Public pressure is the main impetus for change. At the very least your inquiries will give it food for thought.

■ Avoid products with 'new' or 'improved' ingredients if you can't establish to your satisfaction that they haven't been tested on animals. There are plenty of cosmetic chemicals with a long history of safe use that companies can use to create new, safe formulations. ■

Are there other ways?

In Europe, where many of the cosmetics manufacturers are based and much of the safety testing is done, a total of 10.7 million animals were used in 2002 in research, teaching and testing, despite efforts in recent years to reduce the numbers. Around 10% of these were used for product safety testing and of these, about 0.25% (around 2600 animals) for testing cosmetics.

All over the world, many concerned consumers and scientists alike have come to question — and not just for cosmetics — the morality of safety testing on animals, as well as its necessity and scientific validity. Many scientists argue that animal tests are unreliable and often unreproducible. Because of species differences, it's argued that human reactions to certain chemicals may well vary from those of the animals they've been tested on; worse still, what could be beneficial to one species could harm another.

ANIMAL TESTING UNDER FIRE

In the UK, the campaign group Animal Aid recently released a report (on animal testing *per se*, not just for cosmetics testing), which points out the scientific dubiousness of some animal tests and reveals many cases where animal testing has produced unreliable results.

The report concludes that toxicity testing on animals is "exceedingly unreliable" at predicting human toxicity, that it's an extreme form of deliberately inflicted animal suffering and that the adoption of advanced non-animal methodologies should be an absolute priority. "The best model for the study of humans is the human being," it says.

The Australian Association for Humane Research (AAHR) also believes non-animal toxicity testing methods are "certainly more dependable and produce more accurate results" than tests on species that differ from humans in certain aspects. It promotes a wholly different approach to learning about the human body and testing for toxicity that emphasises population studies, clinical research and autopsies — as well as new technologies that are non-invasive and human-based.

And not only animal welfare groups are concerned about animal tests. A recent article in *Nature* magazine concludes that the toxicity tests that have been used for decades are "stuck in a time warp, and are largely based on wasteful and often poorly predictive animal experiments". Most of them over- or underestimate toxicity, or simply don't mirror it very well, *Nature* notes. They're "simply bad science", the director of the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) is quoted as saying.

TRADITIONAL TESTS

Ingredient safety tests measure a chemical's acute and chronic toxicity to humans — its potential to cause

harm through normal use or accidental exposure in the short and long term.

The number of cosmetics companies worldwide that still test their products on animals is difficult to determine, as countries use different reporting systems for animal use in research, teaching and product testing (some separate numbers into these categories, others only collect overall numbers).

In the past, the most commonly used animal tests have been the Lethal Dose 50 (LD50) and Draize eye and skin tests. The LD50 acute toxicity test is designed to test what amount of a particular substance will kill 50% of the test animals; the Draize tests assess the animals' reactions to a substance applied into their eyes or onto their shaved, bare skin.

These tests are perhaps the most reviled, as they can cause extreme pain for the test animals and used to involve large numbers. However, their use has been greatly curtailed in recent years, as more and more companies worldwide are reassessing their animal testing policies and investing in the development of alternatives.

FINDING RELIABLE ALTERNATIVES

At Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in California, the Centre for Alternatives in Animal Testing (CAAT) has been developing *in vitro* (test tube) and other non-whole-animal methods for product safety testing for more than 25 years. These alternatives are developed according to the '3 Rs' of humane science, which seek to **replace** live animals in research or, if that's as yet impossible, **reduce** the number required and **refine** test methods to minimise their pain and distress.

According to CAAT, many cosmetics manufacturers no longer use the traditional tests described above, and those that still do have considerably reduced the number of animals used and refined testing methods with lower dosages and provision of anaesthetics. For example, while the LD50 test is still extensively used (it accounts for one-third of all animal tests worldwide), rather than using 150 animals, it's now more likely to involve just eight animals per chemical.

There are many and varied approaches to establishing a product's safety without the use of live animals. Some of these alternatives include:

- Using *in vitro* techniques that involve no live animals (use of donated human tissue or cell cultures can prevent interspecies variation).
- Using donated human corneas from eye banks, or synthetic or reconstructed human skin, grown in the lab.
- Using human volunteers — for skin sensitivity tests, for example, or even in biomedical research, where 'microdosing' allows testing of certain substances by measuring adverse reactions in humans who've been

injected with a tiny amount of a substance (sub-therapeutic or 'nanodose' concentration).

■ Using computer modelling and maths simulation programs, for example to predict a chemical's toxicity or irritancy and likely interaction with other compounds, based on what's known already about substances with a similar structure.

THE TRENDS

Late last year EU governments and industry groups reached an agreement aimed at refining, reducing and replacing animal use, speeding up the development of alternative safety tests and fast-tracking their validation process.

The industry agreement followed EU legislation introduced a few years back that'll see the use of animals in cosmetics testing gradually phased out — acute toxicity tests will be banned from 2009, those testing for long-term effects from 2013.

While the EU ban is generally welcomed in animal welfare circles, some fear it'll drive animal testing underground. Others criticise its long deadlines, which mean some tests won't be banned till 2013. And even this late deadline may need to be renegotiated, as these tests assessing long-term toxicity are still seen to be harder to mimic *in vitro* and more challenging to replace, according to the director of the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods, quoted in the *Nature* article noted earlier.

Validation confirms that a test accurately predicts a specific effect in humans. It typically requires testing in various laboratories and, if it's reproducible, peer review of the new protocol — a rigorous process that many of the long-established animal tests never had to undergo. According to *Nature*, ECVAM has so far seen 17 alternative tests through to validation; 40 additional ones are under review, and most assess acute toxicity.

Some European countries have had legislation in place for some years banning the use of animals for cosmetics testing. What distinguishes this latest EU ban is that it's a sales ban, which has the potential to put an end to the industry moving its animal testing around the world. And as it's a global industry, with many international brands sold in Australia, the developments in Europe are just as important for consumers here.

The cosmetics industry here is "watching with interest" the developments in Europe, according to the industry association Accord Australasia. "Good efforts have been made over recent years to eliminate needlessly cruel test methods and improve the general treatment and welfare of laboratory animals. However, the industry accepts that more needs to be done," it says.

NOT JUST RATS DIE FOR RESEARCH

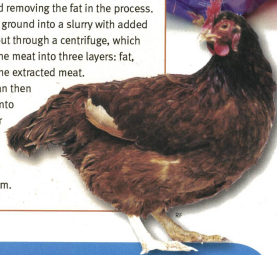
According to data from the Australian Association for Humane Research, the roughly six million animals used in Australia in 2004 in animal experiments include mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits and other lab animals, as well as cats, dogs, sheep, cattle, pigs, horses, donkeys, native mammals, exotic 'feral' animals, primates, domestic fowl, reptiles, fish, amphibians and other aquatic, domestic, stock animals and birds. They're used in biomedical, agricultural and psychological research, population control and product testing.

SEEING THE LIGHT?

Recent recommendations to eat lower-fat cuts of meat have seen reduced demand for the darker meat cuts of chicken — meat that mainly comes from the leg. Although arguably the tastiest part, it also has the highest fat content.

A food scientist in the US has developed a method of turning dark chicken meat to white — and removing the fat in the process. The meat is ground into a slurry with added water and put through a centrifuge, which separates the meat into three layers: fat, water and the extracted meat.

The meat can then be formed into products for restaurants and the fast-food industry. Yum.



100 fat calories

We're less than impressed with the latest marketing campaign for ARNOTT'S Lunch Box Chips. With "Less than 100 calories per pack" blazed across it, you'd be forgiven for thinking this is a new lower-fat chip that's healthier for your kids. In fact they're the same high-fat chips packaged in a small bag, which apparently transforms them into the perfect snack for kids.

OK, life's too short not to enjoy a bag of chips now and then, but don't let clever marketing tactics like this convince you that unhealthy foods should be a regular inclusion in a balanced diet.

ARNOTT'S also includes a reference to the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*, presumably to justify regularly including chips in a child's diet: "Nutritionists say 100 calories is a sensible-sized treat." True, but everyday snacks should mostly include fruit, bread and cereals, vegetable sticks, cheese and yoghurt — food that kids will also get valuable nutrients from.

There's nothing wrong with a packet of chips as an occasional treat, but there are many healthier options to include in kids' lunchboxes.



Acrylamide update

In April 2002 the Swedish National Food Authority reported the presence in some foods of elevated levels of acrylamide — a chemical produced when certain foods are cooked at high temperatures, such as when fried, roasted or baked. Since then members of the UN and EU, including Norway, Switzerland, The Netherlands, the UK and US, have conducted tests and reported finding it in a range of cooked and heat-processed foods.

The concern is that acrylamide has been found to cause cancer in animals, and further studies on its effects on humans are under way.

As a result of the findings, the World Health Organization and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization formed an expert committee to review the available data on the safety of acrylamide, which has since confirmed that it may indeed be a health concern.

Research into reducing acrylamide is continuing and the national regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, is liaising with the food industry to encourage research into practices that would reduce its formation. In the meantime, the advice is to continue to eat a balanced diet, including plenty of fruit and vegetables, and to limit high-fat foods as much as possible.

GREENER CLEANERS?

Our Home Testers trialed two 'green' cleaners alongside a popular supermarket brand, to find out how well green can clean.

Listen to ads for cleaning products these days and you'll hear claims of their abilities to "cut through grease", "kill germs" and "protect your family from harmful bacteria". Cleaning your home has become a war against bacteria — one where the house should come up smelling like roses (or citrus).

There's little doubt these supermarket cleaners work. However, some of their ingredients pollute our waterways and are toxic to aquatic life. Many contain chemicals for which there's no available data on their environmental impact.

There are environmental health concerns around many cleaning products. Ingredients such as solvents and fragrances can linger in the atmosphere, degrading indoor air quality. Exposure to some cleaning products can cause allergic reactions and respiratory irritation in some people. And as we've noted before, antibacterial cleaners can contribute to the development of antibiotic-resistant 'superbugs'. Besides, our immune system needs some exposure to bacteria to function properly, so at best antibacterial cleaners in homes are unnecessary.

There's also concern about chemicals from everyday products, including household cleaners, being absorbed through the skin. Some chemicals bioaccumulate — they stay in the body without being broken down. As these chemicals have been around for a relatively short time, it isn't known yet what their long-term effects are or what (if any) is a safe level of exposure.

To reduce some of these hazards, you may want to try a 'green' multipurpose cleaner. Yet do these do an adequate job?

To find out how well cleaners claiming 'green' credentials measure up to a mainstream brand in cleaning ability, we asked CHOICE Home Testers to compare the performance of a popular multipurpose cleaner with two 'green' products — HERBON Multi-purpose Cleaner and ECO-LOGIC Sweet Orange Multipurpose Spray Cleaner (a product with essentially the same ingredients as BIO-LOGIC Multi Purpose Spray, but with different oils and packaging).

CLEANERS ON TEST

For our mainstream product we chose the top-rating multipurpose cleaner from our last trial — AJAX Spray'n'Wipe Lemon Citrus. Its label says it's "readily biodegradable according to ... AS 4351 Part 2". However, under this standard only the surfactant

IN A NUTSHELL

There was no significant difference between the overall scores of Ajax Spray'n'Wipe and the two 'green' multipurpose cleaners our Home Testers trialed. But for those who'd like to clean with the environment in mind there's unfortunately a big difference in price.

Beware of 'greenwashing' — not all products marketed as green are the real deal.



The cleaners on trial — the two on the right are essentially the same product in different packaging.

(the cleaning agent, which is about 5–20% of the product) is tested for biodegradability, not the whole product, and only 80% of the surfactant has to biodegrade within a certain time. **AJAX Spray'n' Wipe Lemon Citrus** also contains petrochemicals, including an antimicrobial agent listed by the World Health Organization as toxic to aquatic organisms.

The green products were chosen because they use readily biodegradable, plant-based ingredients with low toxicity. Their ingredients lists (which are printed on the labels) include no petrochemicals. Both claim to be 100% biodegradable and not tested on animals.

The synthesised ingredients in these products (such as ethanol) are made from renewable sources such as sugar cane and coconut oil. **HERBON Multipurpose Cleaner** is also certified by the Australian Environmental Labelling Association (AELA).

WHAT ABOUT THE COST?

Besides ingredients, another difference between the mainstream and green cleaners we trialled is the price — you'll pay more for the latter. On average we paid 50 cents per 100 mL for the refill pack of **AJAX** versus 81 cents for **HERBON** and \$1.69 for **ECOLOGIC**.

And while **AJAX Spray'n' Wipe Lemon Citrus** is readily available at most supermarkets, it's harder to track down the other three. **ECOLOGIC Sweet Orange Multipurpose Spray Cleaner** (or its **BIOLOGIC** equivalent) is available in healthfood and organic stores, and in Foodland and IGA in South Australia.

The **HERBON** cleaner is also available in health and organic stores in all states except the NT. You can also buy these products online through organic stores.

THE TRIAL

Seventy-five **CHOICE** Home Testers were randomly sent two out of the three multipurpose cleaners in unmarked spray packs. They used each product over seven days, assessing its ability to clean, its smell and overall performance. We also asked if they'd buy the product if it were reasonably priced, and whether they'd be more likely to buy it if it were better for the environment.

THE VERDICT

The difference in the overall ratings for the three cleaners wasn't statistically significant — they all rated between six and seven out of 10, which is good news if you want to do a green clean. **AJAX** and **ECO-LOGIC** rated slightly higher than **HERBON** for their ability to pick up dirt, grease and grime, and were praised for cleaning easily and having a pleasant smell. One tester liked the fact that **ECO-LOGIC** was gentle on her hands, unlike some other cleaners she'd used.

When we asked the Home Testers if they'd consider buying the products they'd tested (without telling them the prices), 70% of those who'd trialled **AJAX**, 64% of **ECO-LOGIC** and 58% of **HERBON** trialists said they would. Asked if they'd be more likely to buy it if it was credibly shown to be better for the

Green clean — or just greenwash?

Because the two 'green' products in our home trial are quite hard to find in shops, we wondered if there was any comparable multipurpose cleaner within easy reach on the supermarket shelves. We found two claiming eco-credibility — **EARTH CHOICE Multi Purpose** and **CHEM PACK Citro-Clean Multi-purpose Cleaner**.

Many manufacturers promote their products with labels depicting scenes from nature, or by including words like 'natural' and 'environment'. While they may look 'green', it can be hard to tell fact from hype.

According to environmental experts, when determining if a product is truly sustainable (that is, able to be used over generations with minimum impact on the environment, including us), the entire lifecycle of the product and its packaging — its design, the acquisition and use of raw materials, manufacture, use and disposal — are considered. While this is too complex a topic for this article to fully cover, we did check the Material Safety Data Sheets and ingredients lists of the above supermarket products, and asked some environmental experts to comment on their 'green' credentials.

NATURE'S ORGANICS, the manufacturer of **EARTH CHOICE**, said the product is suitable for septic tanks and can be used on gardens in

'grey water' as it's phosphate-free, doesn't contain ammonia and has a low sodium level.

NATURE'S ORGANICS said it tries to use plant-derived ingredients wherever possible, but admits the multipurpose cleaner does contain petrochemicals. It lists the ingredients on the label (most multipurpose cleaners don't).

While 80% of its surfactant biodegrades in accordance with AS 4351 Part 2 (see page 39), the other ingredients

— solvents, builders, perfumes and colours, for example — aren't tested for biodegradability. Some experts also expressed concern about one ingredient, lauryl alcohol ethoxylate, which,



environment 80% said yes for AJAX, 65% for ECO-LOGIC and 63% for HERBON. While this is a hopeful sign for those concerned about the environment, when we asked the trialists what factors were most important to them when buying a cleaner, performance was still at the top of the list, followed by price.

There were some positive comments, such as, "There's no point in using products in our homes that have an adverse affect on the environment." Others were more pragmatic: "No, if the cleaner doesn't do the job efficiently it's not worth buying" and "No, the cheaper 'no frills' brands are better value and do the same job."

SMELLS CLEAN — BUT IS IT?

When comparing HERBON Multi-purpose Cleaner to AJAX Spray'n'wipe Lemon Citrus, one user pointed out she used more HERBON because there was no obvious fragrance. On the other hand, one Home Tester liked the "subtle smell" of HERBON, while another complained that it "didn't have that 'clean' smell".

While a fruity or sharp scent may create the perception of a clean, fresh environment, experts point out that many artificial fragrances in cleaners are a cocktail of petrochemicals, and many of their long-term environmental effects are unknown. Manufacturers aren't required to test them for biodegradability, nor do they have to state what they are — many are simply listed as 'fragrance'.

while being biodegradable, contains impurities that may be carcinogenic.

The other supermarket cleaner that appeared to have eco-cred, CHEM PACK Citro-Clean Multipurpose Cleaner, doesn't include an ingredients list on its label, but it does have a web link to its Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The label also says it's free of "petroleum-based solvents, harmful bleaches, ammonia, salt or phosphates". However, this cleaner contains 40–60% dipentene, which, while distilled from citrus peel and ethanol, is a skin irritant. Using this cleaner without very good ventilation (which is often the case in bathrooms and kitchens) may be inadvisable. On top of this, it's highly flammable.

So can you tell if a cleaner really is 'green'? It's difficult because most products don't list their ingredients, and even when they do, the toxicity or impact on the environment may depend on the percentage used. Experts recommend you only trust reliable academic and scientific sources when looking at information about chemicals on the internet.



CHOICE HOME TESTER COMMENTS

CHOICE Home tester Maria Kelly, South Coogee, NSW: *"I would definitely purchase it... anything to help keep the environment free from pollutants."*



CHOICE Home Tester J Northcott, Peakhurst Heights, NSW: *"To be environmentally friendly is desirable but the product still has to work for you."*



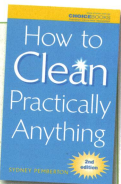
CHOICE Home Tester Donna Lidbury, Hunter Valley, NSW: *"Having a toddler in the house, I'm more conscious of him touching surfaces... I'd change my current products if this product was more environmentally friendly."*

DIY cleaning products

If you're concerned about your cleaner's environmental impact but not prepared to pay so much more for green products (see *What about the cost?*, far left), there are plenty of traditional, cheap products you can use to remove dirt (with a bit of extra elbow grease). You've probably got some of them in the cupboard already.

Soap flakes are biodegradable and safe. Bicarb of soda is a good cleaner and scourer and can deodorise. White vinegar is a mild disinfectant and can be used to clean off mould and grease, and lemon juice can be used in place of bleach.

How to clean practically anything, published by CHOICE Books, has lots of environmentally sensible recipes and suggestions for keeping your house clean. Another option is microfibre cloths, which greatly reduce the need to use cleaning products — see CHOICE, August 2003.



How safe are 4WDs?

High-speed crash test results for 19 compact and large four-wheel drives.



IN A NUTSHELL

- **Most of the tested 4WDs scored well in the latest ANCAP high-speed crash tests — especially those with side and head airbags.**
- **Pedestrian protection, on the other hand, is poor for all but one model.**

The Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) has released high-speed crash test results for a number of compact and large 4WD models tested in Australia and Europe.

The results show that models with side and head airbags (as well as front) generally do a better job of protecting their occupants than those without. Both types are designed to offer protection in side impacts: side airbags for the body, head airbags (also called curtain or head-protecting side airbags) for the head.

Models that perform well in the side-impact crash are eligible for a pole test (see right), which can earn additional points. However, the side and head airbags on the LEXUS RX330 and MAZDA Tribute didn't protect the driver well enough for either model to score extra points from this test.

CHOICE would like to see car manufacturers make side and head airbags available across their entire model range — preferably as standard equipment, or at least as a standalone option and not combined in a more expensive package with other features a buyer may not want.

From a safety point of view, ANCAP recommends not just looking for a model with airbags when buying a car, but also considering additional safety features such as ABS, electronic stability control and traction control, as they all decrease the risk of being involved in an accident in the first place.

Most 4WDs don't offer much pedestrian protection (the HONDA CR-V is the commendable exception). We'd like to see manufacturers urgently start giving more thought to the protection of pedestrians struck by a vehicle.

WHAT'S TESTED?

The test consists of two main crashes. Each contributes up to 16 points to the maximum overall score of 37; the points are converted to the percentage rating given in the table.

- **Offset crash:** The car is crashed at 64 km/h into a fixed barrier with a crushable aluminium face. Only 40% of the car's front (on the driver's side) hits the barrier. This simulates crashing into another car.
- **Side-impact crash:** A 950 kg trolley is run into the driver's side of the stationary car at 50 km/h. This test simulates a fairly small car striking the driver's door. Cars with a relatively high seating position, such as four-wheel drives, can be expected to perform well in this test. ANCAP therefore decided to award the large 4WDs in this test a score of 100% by default, without carrying out the test.

Two further tests can be included to get the overall score:

- Models with head-protecting side airbags are eligible for an optional **pole test**, which can earn an additional two points for a low risk of head injury.



MORE ONLINE

For a limited time you have free access to detailed results from this latest round of ANCAP crash testing, as well as the results for all the cars tested since the start of the program. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on 'ANCAP, Apr 06' under 'Cars' in the index.



VOLKSWAGEN

This test simulates a vehicle sliding sideways into a pole at 29 km/h and hitting it in line with the head of the seated driver.

Models with an **advanced seatbelt warning system** can earn up to three additional points. The system has to meet a range of requirements, such as detecting which seats are taken, whether the seatbelts in those seats are used, and whether the car is moving. If any of the seatbelts for occupied seats aren't used, the system needs to give a visual and audible warning signal.

There's also a **pedestrian impact test** to estimate injuries to pedestrians struck by a vehicle at 40 km/h. This isn't part of the overall score, but is reported separately in the table: the higher the score, the better the protection.

WHAT'S ASSESSED?

The points scored are based on the following assessments from the above tests:

- The car's **structure**: among other things, does the passenger compartment keep its shape, and how far are the steering column and pedals pushed inwards?
- The car's **restraint system**: for example, does the driver or passenger hit any hard parts of the car?
- **Injury risks**, using crash test dummies fitted with sensors that measure forces and movements.

Crash test results are only comparable for vehicles within the same category.

Make / model / year / engine size (airbags), ranked in order of overall rating within category

COMPACT 4WD

SUBARU Forester XS-LP, 2/2003 on, 2.5 L (front, side, head)	89	23
MITSUBISHI Outlander, 2003 on, 2.4 L (front)	76	13
TOYOTA RAV4 Cruiser, 12/2002 on, 2.0 L (front, side, head)	73	27
HONDA CR-V, 2002 on, 2.0 L (front) (A)	72	52
NISSAN X-Trail ST, 2001 on, 2.5 L (front) (A) (B)	68	29
TOYOTA RAV4 Cruiser, 12/2002 on, 2.0 L (front)	68	27
FORD Escape, 2001 on, 3.0 L V6 (front)	67	nt (C)
MAZDA Tribute, 2004 on, 3.0 L V6 (front, side, head)	67	11 (C)

LARGE 4WD

VW Touareg, 2005 on, 2.5 L diesel (front, side, head) (A) (B)	93	20
VOLVO XC90, 2003 on, 2.4 L diesel (front, side, head) (A) (B)	91	27
BMW X5, 2003 on, 3.0 L V6 (front, side, head) (A) (B)	88	5
LAND ROVER Range Rover, 2002 on, 3.0 L diesel (front, side, head) (A)	81	7
LEXUS RX330, 2004 on, 3.3 L V6 (front, side, head)	80	12
MERCEDES BENZ M-class, 2002 on, 2.7 L (front, side, head) (A) (B)	80	12
TOYOTA Prado VX / Grande, 2003 on, 4.0 L V6 (front, side, head)	80	nt
TOYOTA Prado GXL, 2003 on, 4.0 L V6 (front)	74	nt
MITSUBISHI Pajero Exceed, 2004 on, 3.8 L V6 (front, side)	70	nt
TOYOTA Landcruiser 100 Series, 2004 on, 4.7 L (front)	67	22
NISSAN Patrol ST-S, 2004 on, 3.0 L diesel (front)	60	23

Source: Crash test data from the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), which is supported by Australian and New Zealand motoring organisations, all Australian state governments, the New Zealand government and the FIA Foundation.

nt Not tested.

(A) The European model was tested by EuroNCAP. Australian specifications may vary and models sold in Australia might provide slightly different levels of protection from those described.

(B) Left-hand-drive European model tested.

(C) While the Mazda Tribute and Ford Escape are based on the same vehicle, the Mazda's pedestrian rating doesn't apply to the Ford Escape because it has different body panels.

Make sure you get the right blender for the job you want to do.

Need to blend in?

PHOTOS: GENE ROSS

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: 14 handheld stick blenders ranging from \$15 to \$175, some with chopper/processor attachments and some without.
- Nine can handle harder foods; the rest are practical for soft foods only. Use our What to buy selection to choose the best one to suit your food preparation needs.

Whether you want to purée soup and veggies for your toddler, blend a fruit smoothie, whip egg whites, chop breadcrumbs or create delicious homemade hummus, mayonnaise and pesto, a stick blender can be the tool for the job. Not only is it versatile, but its compact size and long, thin shape mean it's convenient too — you can process food while it's still in a saucepan or jug without having to transfer the contents to a separate bowl. It's a kitchen tool that some people just can't do without.

But before you run out and buy the latest whizzbang model, it's worth considering what you'll be using it for. It could mean the difference between spending less than \$20 or \$175 plus.

All the blenders on test performed well in the soft food tests (see the table, page 46, for details). So if you'll only be using one for blending or emulsifying soft foods — soups, cooked veggies, mayonnaise and milkshakes, for example — a cheap model may be all you need.

But if you want to process hard or dry foods — chop carrots, grind nuts or make a curry paste, say — you'll need to spend \$40 or more to get a model with the right attachments to do the job. See *What to buy*, right, for the ones we recommend.

What to buy

Models are profiled in rank

FOR HARD/DRY AND SOFT FOODS

BRAUN MULTIQUICK MR 430 HC PLUS

Price: \$70

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent at all tasks with both soft and hard foods.
- Lightest model tested.
- Easy to change attachments.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Blade shaft and attachments are dishwasher-safe.
- Two-year warranty.

BAD POINTS

- Less grip support due to its slim design.
- If you need to work it hard for a while, it can become awkward and uncomfortable to operate.
- Plastic shaft and blade guard can stain.
- Larger attachments need storage space.

SUNBEAM STICKMASTER PLUS SM6400

Price: \$60

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for blending soup, making mayonnaise, chopping carrots and making pesto sauce, and very good at making curry paste.
- Controls are easy to press.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Blade shaft and attachments are dishwasher-safe.

BAD POINTS

- Fairly comfortable grip with non-slip area.
- Simple, easy-to-understand instructions with recipes.

BAD POINTS

- Plastic shaft and blade guard can stain.
- Larger attachments need storage space.

FOR SOFT FOODS ONLY

LIVING ESSENTIALS STICK MIXER WITH BEAKER AND WALL MOUNT LESB10

Price: \$20

Can't chop raw vegetables, despite the manufacturer's claim; only suitable for soft foods.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for soft foods.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Metal shaft and guard won't stain.
- Fairly comfortable grip.
- Two-year warranty.
- Low price.

BAD POINTS

- If you need to work it hard for a while, it can become awkward and uncomfortable to operate.
- Metal guard may scratch saucepans, bowls and mixing utensils.

BREVILLE WIZZ STICK HB15

Price: \$35

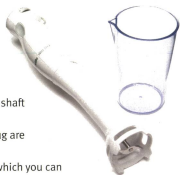
Recommended for soft foods only.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for soft foods.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Blade shaft and jug are dishwasher-safe.
- Has a hook from which you can hang the blender for storage.
- Simple, easy-to-understand instructions with recipes.

BAD POINTS

- Variable dimmer-style speed control makes it hard to get the right speed.
- Slightly heavier and longer than most, which can make it a little awkward to operate.
- Open vents around the motor can allow in moisture or splashes.
- Plastic shaft and blade guard can stain.



HOMEMAKER STAB MIXER HMHBK

Price: \$18

Can't chop raw vegetables, despite the manufacturer's claim; only suitable for soft foods.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for soft foods.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Low price.

BAD POINTS

- Uncomfortable vibration while processing.
- Grip area is a little wide.
- If you need to work it hard for a while, it can become awkward and uncomfortable to operate.
- Plastic shaft and blade guard can stain.

RONSON 2 SPEED STICK BLENDER RSB1

Price: \$25

Not recommended for chopping, grinding or crushing; only suitable for soft foods.

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for soft foods.
- Detachable blade shaft for easier cleaning.
- Low price.

BAD POINTS

- Lowest ease of use score.
- Grip area is a little wide.
- If you need to work it hard for a while, it can become awkward and uncomfortable to operate.
- Plastic shaft and blade guard can stain.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- For hard/dry foods as well as soft, the **MOULINEX Optipro**, **BRAUN Multiquick Advantage**, **KENWOOD Wizzard Pro**, **BAMIX Basic** and **BREVILLE Wizz Stick Plus Stainless** all got very good performance scores and you'd probably be happy with them. But they all cost more (two of them a good deal more) than the two top-rating models in the *What to buy* list. The **BAMIX** and the **BREVILLE** struggled with curry paste (essentially, grinding hard ingredients to a paste); see the table, page 46, for the rest of the scores.
- Making both pesto (processing softer ingredients to a paste) and curry paste was a challenge for the **KENWOOD Hand Blender** and **KAMBROOK Essentials Stick Mix**, leaving them with a slightly lower performance score, but they coped well with chopping carrots, and at \$40 are the cheapest of the models suitable for hard/dry foods. Both models need storage space for their larger attachments.
- Despite claims to chop raw vegetables, the **CHIEF Hand Blender** couldn't handle raw carrots, and it has the worst emulsifying score (for making mayonnaise) of all the tested models. It also has a slightly uncomfortable grip and its shaft isn't detachable, which makes it difficult to clean around the blade.
- Apart from the **BRAUN Multiquick Advantage** and the **CHIEF**, all the above have metal blade guards that may scratch saucepans, bowls and mixing utensils.

What to look for

- **A comfortable grip**, to suit the shape of your hand.
- **Soft-touch controls** that don't need much force to operate.
- **Accessories** (such as a whisk or chopper attachment) that you'll use. See *Useful features*, below.
- **Rubber base** on the chopper attachment. This makes the bowl stable when the blender's operating.
- **Detachable blade shaft and/or guard** for easier cleaning.

USEFUL FEATURES

- **Pulse function** gives a short burst of power. It's useful for small quantities of dry foods, to help distribute the load and to improve uniformity. All the tested models have it.
- **Chopper**. This is a separate unit that's useful for chopping/grinding/processing ingredients like nuts, bread, coffee, herbs, spices and raw vegetables. It's a very handy attachment when you're dealing with small quantities, as it saves getting out a large food processor.
- **Whipper/beater**. This attachment is specifically for whipping cream and beating egg whites. For some models it's a large whisk, for others it's a disk-shaped attachment.
- **Jug/beaker**. A tall, narrow container that's useful for puréeing or blending.
- **Wall mount** for easy-to-access storage of the blender and accessories.

Recipes

If you need some inspiration to get started using your stick blender, try the following recipes, as used by our home economist in the tests.

PESTO SAUCE

- 1 cup fresh basil leaves
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic
- ¼ cup toasted pinenuts
- Salt and pepper to taste

Place all ingredients into the chopper/processor and process until smooth (no more than one minute).

THAI RED CURRY PASTE

- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 1 teaspoon shrimp paste
- 1 long red chilli (seeds removed if you don't want too much heat)
- 2 teaspoons dried red chilli
- 2 tablespoons galangal, peeled and roughly chopped
- 4 tablespoons lemon grass, sliced
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest
- 4 coriander roots
- 3 cloves garlic

Place all ingredients into the grinder/processor and process for no more than one minute. Redistribute ingredients while processing if the mixture is pushed to the sides.

Brand / model
(in rank order within categories)

SUITABLE FOR HARD/DRY AND SOFT FOODS

BRAUN Multiquick MR 430 HC Plus	91	68	98
SUNBEAM StickMaster Plus SM6400	89	68	96
MOULINEX Optipro DDF446	86	75	90
BRAUN Multiquick Advantage MR 4050 CA	86	73	90
KENWOOD Wizard Pro HB665	85	70	90
BAMIX Basic	84	78	86
BREVILLE Wizz Stick Plus Stainless HB90	83	78	84
KENWOOD Hand Blender HB520	79	75	80
KAMBROOK Essentials Stick Mix KSB7	74	68	76

SUITABLE FOR SOFT FOODS ONLY

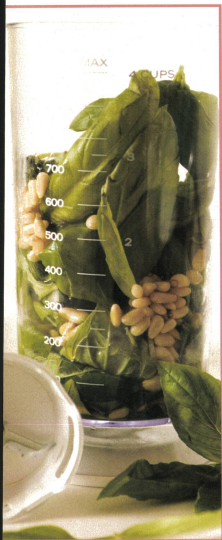
LIVING ESSENTIALS Stick Mixer LESB10	84	68	90
BREVILLE Wizz Stick HB15	83	60	90
HOMEMAKER Stab Mixer HMHBK	83	63	90
RONSON 2 Speed Stick Blender RS81	82	58	90
CHIEF Hand Blender CFHB20	72	63	75

PERFORMANCE

1 Overall score (%)	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Performance score (%)
91	68	98
89	68	96
86	75	90
86	73	90
85	70	90
84	78	86
83	78	84
79	75	80
74	68	76

COMPONENTS OF PERFORMANCE SCORE

Blending score (%)	Emulsifying score (%)	Chopping score (%)	Grinding score (%)
100	100	90	100
100	100	100	80
100	100	100	75
100	100	100	75
100	100	100	75
100	100	90 (A)	50
100	100	90	50
100	100	100	50
100	80	100	50
100	80	0 (B)	na
100	80	na	na
100	80	0 (B)	na
100	80	na	na
90	60	0 (B)	na



For people with a disability

A representative from the Independent Living Centre, NSW, assessed the blenders' suitability for people with a disability.

■ If you have problems with your **hands or wrists** the best models are easy to clean and lightweight, with easy-to-press buttons and a large grip area. Also look for ones with blades that either don't need to be changed, or are easily changed using little force or manipulation. If possible, use the pulse action to avoid needing prolonged force to operate the blender. The **BRAUN Multiquick Advantage**, **BREVILLE Wizz Stick Plus Stainless** and **MOULINEX Optipro** can all be recommended.

■ If you're **vision-impaired**, it's very difficult to recommend any model, for safety reasons. While a blade guard surrounds the blade from the top and partly covers its sides, it's exposed at the bottom. You could injure yourself if you accidentally touched the blade area, or if the moving blade came into contact with the cord.

■ For people with mild **cognitive impairment**, simplicity is the key and most of the models can be recommended. Different people might find the labelling on some a little unclear, but they're all very simple to operate, with one or two buttons. The fewer buttons to choose from, the better.

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in January/February 2006.

na Not applicable: the manufacturer doesn't recommend or claim it does this, or the model doesn't come with a chopper/processor attachment.

(A) This was the score when using the multipurpose blade that comes with the Bamix. It scored 100% when we used the optional processor attachment (see footnote D).

(B) See Performance score, below.

(C) Blade and blade guard only.

(D) This price doesn't include the processor (rrp \$59.95), which we used for the grinding and processing tests, or the 'B blade' (rrp \$19.95), which we used for the emulsifying test; they have to be purchased separately. The model may be available for \$149 in some shops.

1 Overall score

The scores are weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 25%
- Performance: 75%

2 Ease of use score

We assessed ease of use and cleaning, weighted as follows:

- Controls: 25% (including position, type and markings).
- General comfort and grip: 25%
- Cleaning: 50% (including general cleaning and disassembly of parts for cleaning).

3 Performance score

This score includes individual performance scores, weighted equally, for:

SOFT FOODS

- Blending: potato and leek soup.
- Emulsifying: mayonnaise.

HARD FOODS

- Chopping: carrots.
- Grinding: curry paste (hard ingredients, so a fairly harsh test).

- Processing: pesto sauce (softer ingredients).

The hard food tests were carried out if the product's instructions said it could handle them. The performance score of all the models in the hard/dry foods section of the table is therefore a combination of the five tests listed above.

In the case of the **LIVING ESSENTIALS**,

HOMEMAKER and **CHIEF** blenders, the instructions said they could be used for chopping foods but our tests found they couldn't chop raw carrots. While this gave them a score of zero for chopping, if all you want is a blender for soft foods, you might just as well consider these three models, especially given their low price. So we disregarded the zero score and rated them for blending and emulsifying only.

	FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS				
Processing score (%)	Chopper attachment	Whisk attachment	Removable shaft	Weight (g)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
✓	✓	✓	✓	590	2	Spain	Gillette	70
✓	✓	✓	✓	800	1	China	Sunbeam	60
✓	✓	✓	✓	780	1	France	Moulinex / Groupe SEB	120
✓	✓	✓	✓	630	2	Spain	Gillette	90
✓	✓	✓	✓	790	1	China	Hagemeyer	80
✓	✓	✓	✓ (C)	960	5	Switzerland	Cambur	175 (D)
✓	✓	✓	✓	740	1	Spain	Breville	80
✓	✓	✓	✓	830	1	China	Hagemeyer	40
✓	✓	✓	✓	820	1	China	Kambrook	40
			✓	800	2	China	Mistral	20
			✓	850	1	China	Breville	35
			✓	800	1	China	GAF Control	18
			✓	790	1	China	Ronson	25
				670	2	China	Mistral	15

bookshelf

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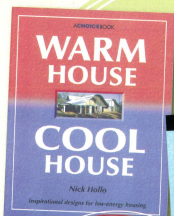
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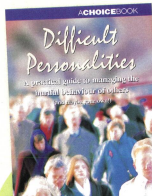
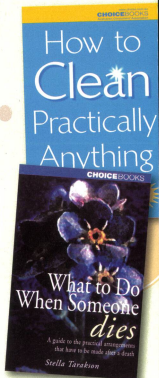
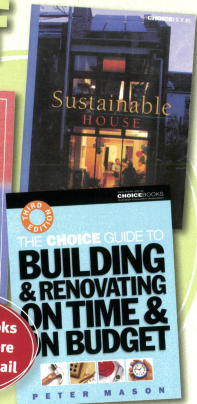
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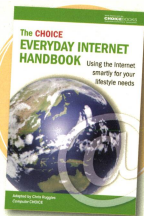
Trustworthy and reliable buying information for your baby.

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THE CHOICE EVERYDAY INTERNET HANDBOOK

Learn how to use the internet effectively in your everyday life.

\$27.00 CODE: EICB



SWIRL: WINE BASICS

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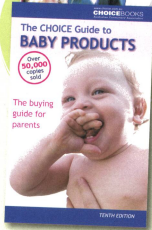
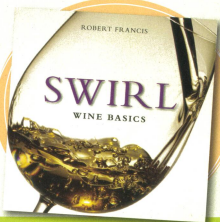
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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in *CHOICE*. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Golden Circle has recalled **Golden Circle Baby Food** varieties, including Junior Meat Mates Vegetables, Beans & Beef (1–3 years), in a 220 g can with ring-pull lid; Junior Meat Mates Pear, Rice & Mango Pudding (1–3 years), 170 g glass jar; and 3rd Foods Risotto Vegetable & Beef (from 10 months), 170 g glass jar. Affected products have best-before dates up to and including 03/01/08.

The problem: They may contain soft plastic pieces.

What to do: Don't feed them to infants. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 730 101.

ALOE VERA: Aloe Vera Australia has recalled **Aloe Vera Jelly**, 125 mL bottle, batch 30733, expiry date February 2006; **Nature's Fruit Aloe Vera Crème Plus**, 100 g jar, all batches, AUST L 52825; and **Aloe Vera After Sun Soothing Spray**, 125 mL bottle, all batches.

The problem: They may be contaminated with bacteria that can pose a risk to health.

What to do: Don't use them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 106 166 to arrange to return the product and get a refund. Contact your GP if you have concerns for your health.

ointment: Kingsley Health Care Pharmaceuticals has recalled **Your Pharmacy Dermatitis and Psoriasis Relief Ointment** jar, expiry date Nov 08, batch number 6469, sold in the ACT, NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

The problem: The level of salicylic acid may not be the same as the level claimed on the label.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

Baby Teether: RC2 Australia has recalled **The First Years and Sesame Workshop** liquid-filled teethers, sold between July 2005 and January 2006. The specific designs affected are **The First Years Cool Animal Teether**, in fish, zebra and dinosaur designs, style number Y1474; **The First Years**

Floating Friends Teether, style number Y1474; and **Sesame Workshop Sesame Beginnings Chilli & Chew Teether**, style number Y3095.

The problem: The liquid in the teethers may be contaminated with bacteria.

What to do: Remove them from the reach of children. Place the teether in a sealed plastic bag and return it to Learning Curve Australia, 77 Ricketts Road, Mount Waverley 3149. Include your return address to receive a replacement teether and free gift.

For more information email service@rc2aust.com.au or phone (03) 9550 3600.

Baby Carrier: Mountain Designs has recalled **Joey Baby Carrier**, a backpack-style baby carrier, batch numbers 1469 and 1829, which can be found on the loop label on the lower storage compartment of the pack.

The problem: The webbing system for the seating mechanism has been incorrectly threaded.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to your nearest store for a refund, or go to www.mountaindesign.com for more information.

Children's Toy Chair: Mattel has recalled **Fisher-Price Laugh & Learn Musical Learning Chair**, sold since June 2005 at major retailers and toy stores for approximately \$89.99, with product code number H7172, which can be found on the bottom of the chair beside the battery compartment.

The problem: A child may become lodged between the seatback and side table, possibly leading to entrapment of the neck and possible strangulation and/or injury.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Call 1300 135 312, Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm AEST, to receive a repair kit containing a plastic piece that snaps into place between the chair and side table, preventing the possibility of entrapment.

Toy: The Warehouse Group has recalled **Happy Kids Magnetic Numbers and Letters**.

The problem: They pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Remove them from the reach of children. Return them to any Warehouse store for a refund.

Toy: McPherson's Consumer Products has recalled **Twinkle Tots Animal Swimmer**, barcode number 9316201 306957, and **Little Wishes Animal Swimmer**, barcode number 9316201 322179, both of which are a brightly coloured plastic wind-up dolphin, 13 cm long. They were sold between 21 July 2004 and 5 January 2006 in Big W, Kmart, Woolworths, Priceline and other independent stores.

The problem: Small parts may break off and pose a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children, and return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 651 146.

Toy: Metcash has recalled the **Deluxe Kitchen Set (Toy Set)**, APN 9310676155258, made by Korbond NZ and sold through Action stores.

The problem: It poses a choking hazard to young children.

What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

SCOOTER: Funstastic and MGA Entertainment have recalled **Bratz Stylin' Scooter**, model number 266563, manufactured by Jurong Dumar Bicycle Inc. of China prior to July 2004, and sold through Kmart, Myer, Target and Toys R Us stores. The manufacturer's name can be found on the product specification label on the underside of the scooter.

The problem: The wheels may break or become damaged, possibly causing injury to the rider.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or replacement, or for more information call 1800 660 655 or 1800 244 543, or email info@funstastic.com.au.

HAIR STRAIGHTENER: M & U Imports has recalled **Hi-Lift Hair Straightener**, model E038, with serial numbers between 015278 and 021957, sold since 23 August 2005.

The problem: The power cord may be faulty and may come out of the iron,

possibly causing an electric shock.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to M & U Imports, 660A South Road, Moorabbin 3189 for a refund, or for more information call (03) 9555 1533, or email mui@muimports.com.au.

COFFEE MAKER: Kathmandu has recalled **Basecamp Espresso 9 Cup Coffee Maker**.

The problem: There is a risk of excessive pressure build-up resulting in an explosion.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to your nearest Basecamp store for a refund, or for more information call the Kathmandu head office in New Zealand on +64 3 373 6125.

GLASS TABLE: Freedom has recalled **Calvin Frosted Glass Table**. The table consists of a frosted tempered glass top with independently affixed chrome-coloured legs. It was available in two dining sizes and as a coffee table, and was sold between 18 May 2005 and 9 December 2005. The Calvin Black Glass Table isn't affected.

The problem: Due to the design, moving the table may cause twisting and uneven stressing of the glass top, and under certain conditions it may break.

What to do: Call 1300 135 588 to arrange for replacement or a refund.

LANTERN: Shanghaied has recalled **Twisted Wire Lanterns**, a twisted wire and fabric lantern sold in three colours, with product codes LAC037, LAC038 and LAC039.

The problem: A flame from a candle may ignite the fabric lining.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CAR: Toyota has recalled **Toyota RAV4**, model years 19 May 1995 to 31 July 1995, within the following VIN ranges: 71SC10: 00094629–00100908; 72SC11: 00013195–00033869.

The problem: The front suspension coil may be susceptible to corrosion, and possibly fracture.

What to do: All owners should be contacted by letter, or contact your nearest Toyota dealer for more information.

5

index

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership, call (02) 9577 3399.) Members of the council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales.

COUNCIL: Chair: Jan McClelland.

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How's this for an upfront, honest ad?

\$49.99 is a bit pricey for a pair of car mats which, according to the ad, won't last.



Dear ALAN

We're delighted to see that you're making the most of your Virgin Credit Card. If you'd like to get even more out of it, here's an opportunity to increase your credit limit from \$24,900 to \$25,000.

If \$25,000 wasn't what you had in mind please give us a call and we are available to help you to get the right limit for your situation.

credit Card. If you'd like to get it from \$24,900 to \$25,000.

The sky's the limit at Virgin...

Alan Parry was bowled over with VIRGIN MONEY's generous offer — a credit increase of a whole \$100. Don't spend it all at once, Alan.



A bootylicious bargain

Ladies — forget diet, exercise, even liposuction... if you're unhappy with your bottom, just buy yourself a new one — and for less than five bucks!

WHY GO ELSEWHERE?

Phillip Elkins thinks this is an example of unintended truth in advertising.



Bitterly disappointed...

...that bitters aren't mentioned on the ingredients list (and, according to our reader, this drink tastes nothing like the real lemon, lime and bitters).

LEMON & LIME DRINK. INGREDIENTS: CARBONATED WATER, SUGAR, RECONSTITUTED FRUIT JUICES, LEMON 2.5%, LIME 2.5%, FLAVOURS, PRESERVATIVES (211, 222, COLOURS 102, 133). © CADBURY SCHWEPES GROUP TRADE MARK. MADE IN AUSTRALIA FROM LOCAL AND IMPORTED INGREDIENTS.

CRS CHLORINE RESISTANT SWIMWEAR

- The fabric in this garment may become see through when wet. **CAUTION:** Pools, Spas & Saunas using harsh chemicals (i.e. chlorine etc.) may break down the elasticity & colour of the garment.

Designed for a swimsuit competition, perhaps?

While one of its labels states this swimsuit is 'CRS' (that's chlorine-resistant swimwear, of course), the care instructions warn against exposing it to suntan oil, chemicals, pools, spas and saunas using harsh chemicals ("ie chlorine etc"), even washing in hot water or detergent, or drying it in sunlight... All this, and the fact that it may become see-through when wet, makes us wonder exactly where the manufacturers thought you *could* wear it...

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to P Elkins. Thanks also to A Apsitis, C Caldwell, J Masche, A Parry and S Reader for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.